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# Raw

magazine

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June 2000

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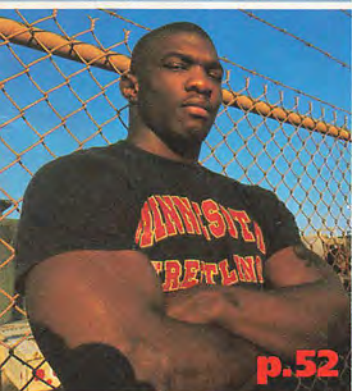
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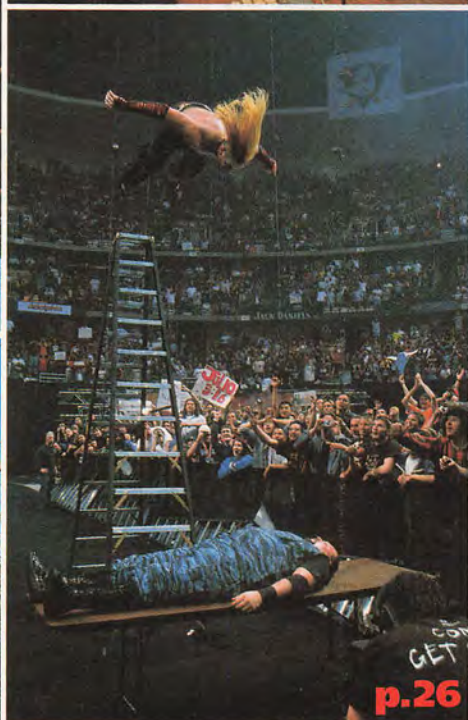
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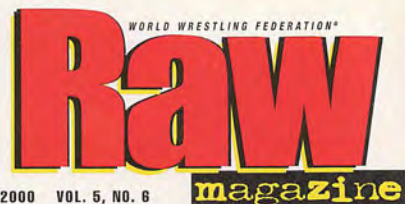
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7% GST. Foreign 12/\$38.40 or 24/\$70.80. Payment in U.S. funds only.  
No foreign credit orders. Allow 4-6 weeks for delivery.

World Wrestling Federation Entertainment, Inc.  
P.O. Box 394, Mt. Morris, IL 61054-0394

A7RAWX



JUNE 2000 VOL. 5, NO. 6

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**CIRCULATION/SUBSCRIPTION**

Customer Service: 740-375-2312

World Wrestling Federation RAW (ISSN 1087-0164) is published  
monthly by World Wrestling Federation Entertainment, Inc. © 2000  
World Wrestling Federation Entertainment, Inc., 1241 East Main  
Street, Stamford, CT 06902 and published in Canada by World  
Wrestling Federation Entertainment Canada, Inc. (GST No.  
R12189385), 2 Lansing Square, Suite 1003, Willowdale, Ontario,  
Canada M2J 4P6. Basic subscription rates are \$24.00 for 12 issues  
and \$35.00 for 24 issues for U.S. and U.S. possessions. Canadian  
rates are \$43.00 for 12 issues and \$68.00 for 24 issues including 7%  
GST. Foreign rates are \$38.40 for 12 issues and \$70.80 for 24 issues.  
ALL ORDERS ARE PAYABLE IN U.S. FUNDS ONLY. NO FOREIGN  
CREDIT ORDERS WILL BE ACCEPTED. Periodical Postage Paid at  
Stamford, CT, and other additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER:  
Send address changes to World Wrestling Federation RAW, World  
Wrestling Federation Entertainment, Inc., P.O. Box 394, Mount  
Morris, IL 61054-0394. Printed by R.R. Donnelley & Sons, Mattoon,  
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# RAGIN' ROSS



## Random thoughts & opinions from under my black Resistol hat!

By Jim Ross

The *King of the Ring* is only a few weeks away, and the annual tournament—originating this year from the sold-out FleetCenter in Boston—seems to always elevate the career of a viable Superstar. I expect more than one performer will be presented with the opportunity to “rise to the occasion” at this year’s classic. Because of the presence of so many outstanding young competitors on the talent roster, this year’s tourney should really be exciting and highly competitive. Someone will have the chance to move to the next level, or a top hand to re-establish main-event status.

The **Rock**, much to the chagrin of **Triple H** and the beloved **McMahon Family** (sans **Linda**), has firmly established himself as the top man in the Federation. The big question is who will dislodge “the Great One,” and the eventual answer may surprise us all. At 27 years of age, The Rock is poised for years of dominance in the Federation, which doesn’t set well

with several members of the roster. The McMahon-Helmsley faction didn’t want “another **Stone Cold Steve Austin**” created in the World Wrestling Federation, but it’s too late for that. The Rock will do for the Federation, long term, what **Michael Jordan** did for the NBA.

Too much outside interference is annoying to this Okie.

The **Undertaker** has something to say about who will be “the man” around here.

The **Big Show** continues to search for a comfortable natural persona, but let’s not lose sight of the obvious. The biggest athlete in the world has unlimited potential, and once he puts together the mental and the physical aspects of the game, the 7-foot-2, 500-pounder could virtually be untouchable. The question is...when?

**Chris Benoit** has always been one of my favorite competitors, and sooner rather than later he is going to assume a larger role within the Federation. Benoit’s tenacity and toughness are hard to replicate. The only knock on the Edmonton native has been with his verbal skills. I’ve got no problem with the way the “Crippler” speaks. Do you?

Both the **Road Dogg** and **X-Pac** are such strong personalities and, yes, they make a damn great tag team, but I would like to see these two embark on individual careers as

the year progresses. Title gold is not beyond the grasp of either of these guys. They ain’t “sidekicks” anymore.

How would you like to go on a long, long car trip with **Muffy** and that whiny voice of hers? Sources say the boisterous blonde is a helluva athlete, though.

No truth to the rumor that **Mae Young** is dating **Ted Turner**.

Does **Ivory** have broadcasting in her future?

**Dean Malenko** has more chain-wrestling maneuvers than just about anyone I’ve seen since the heyday of the legendary **Danny Hodge** over 20 years ago. Malenko was one of the primary instructors of **X-Pac** when young **Sean Waltman** first broke into the business.



**Triple H** is the most cerebral competitor I've ever been associated with. Whether one likes his in-ring persona or not, no one can deny "**the Game's**" rise to the top. Triple H has surpassed all his former **Kliq** mates in virtually every aspect of the game, and that's saying something.

I hope we see more Light Heavyweight contests in the future. Their faster-paced offense is exciting to watch, and these competitors rely on technique and speed to get it done. I'm one who believes you don't have to be a 300-pounder to be successful in the World Wrestling Federation.

What team is more physically intimidating than the **Acolytes**? None, for my money. Toughness is what **Faarooq** and **Bradshaw** are all about, and these two former collegiate All-American linemen have all the tools it takes to dominate the Federation's tag-team scene. These two give "Happy Hour" a new meaning.

Got a feeling **Kane's** dark side is about to get even darker.

A-s-s has been marketable in various forms of entertainment for centuries, but who would have ever thought **Rikishi Phatu's** ample-sized behind would become his signature? As **Mick Foley** would say, "Rikishi is a great dancer for a big man." Big as in 424 pounds!

Speaking of ass, **Mr. Ass** is in the process of a grueling physical-therapy regimen to rehab his severely torn rotator cuff. This talented competitor is at a huge crossroads in his career, considering the seriousness of his injury. Lots of untapped potential within this magnificent pure athlete.

**Eddie Guerrero** reminds me of **HBK** at times, and that means the second-generation star is very special.



Are **Edge** and **Christian** really on the same page, or is that what they want us to believe? In any event from where I sit, these two young Canadians are on the verge of greatness.

**Matt** and **Jeff Hardy** may well be the future of tag-team wrestling in our business. Being real brothers gives the two young North Carolinians a leg up, much like it did the legendary **Brisco Brothers** in the '70s.

We may see more of **Chyna** later this year than any of us ever dreamed.

**Kurt Angle** is getting so good at what he does that the Olympic gold medal winner is bound to become a fan favorite. It's true! It's true!

What's the most popular? The **3-D**, the use of **tables**, or **Buh-Buh Ray** and **D-Von Dudley** themselves?

When is **Stevie Richards** going to find himself?

Sources say there is considerable jealousy within the women's locker room. A real slobberknocker could be brewing.

**Stone Cold Steve Austin** has trained as relentlessly as any athlete I've ever known in his quest to return to prominence in the Federation. No one has ever dominated every phase of this business as Austin did prior to his spinal surgery. The Rattlesnake's critics say the Texan will never be the same. I agree. Austin will be better! I have read where disgruntled wannabes have attempted to take credit for the Federation's success, but no one individual deserves more credit than the toughest S.O.B. in the World Wrestling Federation, Stone Cold Steve Austin. Business is about to pick up!!

Take care,

J.R.

Stephanie McMahon-Helmsley.

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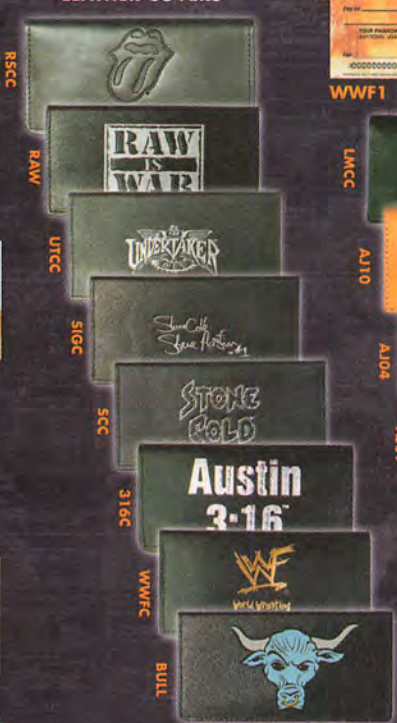


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## Radical Reaction

Dear Editor,

I just got my first issue of *RAW Magazine* in the mail. You've got a helluva magazine! I really enjoyed the article "Southern Discomfort" (April 2000). It's a shame that WCW released such great, talented athletes like the Radicalz. I'm sure that their careers will flourish here in the World Wrestling Federation. WCW made a big mistake in releasing these guys, and now that mistake will come



back and bite them in the ass. The Radicalz got that big push they needed in their careers. I wish them the best.

Adam Lopez  
San Antonio, TX

Dear Editor,

I just wanted to say what a great cover story you had on Chris Benoit, Eddy Guerrero, Dean Malenko and Perry Saturn in the April issue of *RAW Magazine*. I especially enjoyed hearing their side of the story on their reasons for leaving WCW and coming to work for the World Wrestling Federation. Chris Benoit is one of my all-time favorite athletes, and seeing him win the Federation's Intercontinental Title at this year's *WrestleMania* was awesome. I hope they realize what a great career choice they made and that the Federation is not filled with empty promises. Also, in that same issue, I've got to say that the article on Solofa Fatu, Jr. (better known as Rikishi Phatu) was excellent. I would love to see similar articles in the future on wrestlers and their past gimmicks—ones that were successful and ones that weren't so successful. Guys such as Rocky Maivia, the Ringmaster, and one of my favorites...Isaac Yankem, DDS.

Joey Valdez  
Chino, CA

Dear Editor,

I just got finished reading the entire April *RAW Magazine* from cover to cover, and I was especially interested in two of the articles in particular. "Southern Discomfort" was an eye-opener, to say the least. As a follower of the Radicalz through the years, it was great to get behind the men and see what makes them tick, and I'm very happy to have them in the World Wrestling Federation. The other story that really touched me was "Weight Not Want Not," the story of how Paul Bearer lost all the weight. As a fellow overweight man I have been saying for a long time that I will lose weight, but never had the will power to do it. But after reading the story, [I realized] he did everything that people have been telling me to do for the past two months. I am happy to say that it really got to me, and I have begun to change my eating and drinking habits. What really got

to me was what Bearer said at the end of the story, "You need to lose the weight... or you're gonna die." That did it for me.

Rob  
Via E-mail

## Thank You, Percy

Dear Editor,

I would like to thank you, but more importantly, I would like to thank Percy "Paul Bearer" Pringle. His article inspired me to get off my ass and do something about my weight problem. I'm 16 years old, and I weigh 245 pounds. After reading the article, I thought about my own weight problem. I try to cut down on sweets, coffee and carbonated drinks. Exercise is also a big part of my life now. So, Percy, you didn't just help yourself, you helped others.

John Fiore  
Pawcatuck, CT

## Women Can Wrestle, Too

Dear Editor,

I'm writing regarding a letter that was published in the April 2000 *RAW Magazine*. Michelle Harmon of Arnold, Missouri, said there should be more female wrestling in the World Wrestling Federation, and I couldn't agree with her more. A lot of people enjoy watching two women in the middle of the ring, putting complicated moves and holds on each other. Most of these people, however, neglect to write in or voice their opinion because they feel it's a lost cause, or that one opinion doesn't make a difference. Please, don't get the wrong idea—I absolutely love the World Wrestling Federation and all of its storylines and characters—but I do think *RAW Magazine* should hold a poll. Do the guys want to see two women rolling around, pulling hair, ripping clothes and gyrating their hips, or two men doing the same. Just an idea.

Kimm Proffitt  
Rockville, MD

*Eds. Note: Well, readers?*



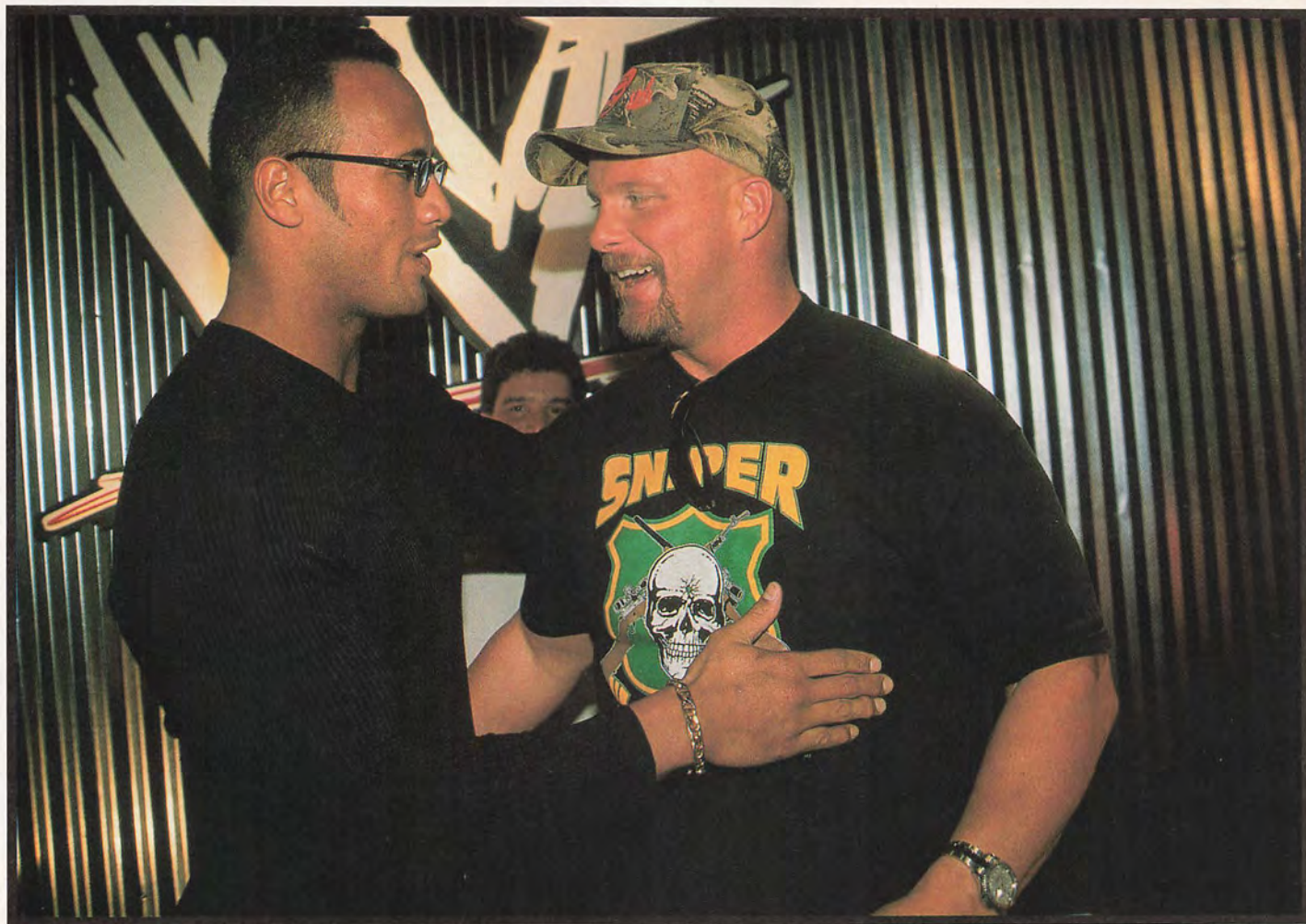
## Samoan Pride

Dear Editor,

Thank you for the wonderful and long-overdue article on Solofa Fatu, Jr., better known to World Wrestling Federation fans as Rikishi Phatu. I have watched this great performer closely from his days as a Headshrinker to where he is now. [Solofa,] you have paid your dues, and I am very happy for your new success! As a fellow Samoan and a loyal Federation fan, I'm very proud of The Rock's and Rikishi's successes in the world of sports-entertainment. *Malo lava usos!* I hope in the near future *RAW Magazine* will do a special story on the Samoan family dynasty, from the old days of the late High Chief Peter Maivia to the Wild Samoans, Sivi Afi, the Headshrinkers, Tonga Kid, Yokozuna, and finally to The Rock and Rikishi. I sincerely hope you take this into consideration.

Tui Suisala  
San Francisco, CA

*Eds. Note: Funny you should ask that, Tui. Don't miss the July issue of RAW!*




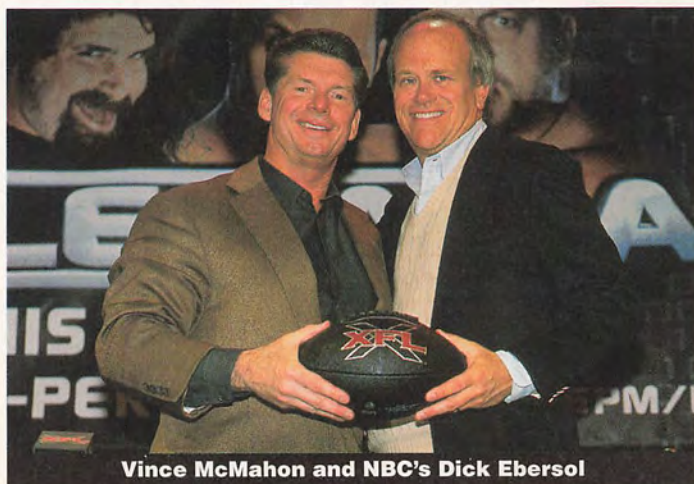
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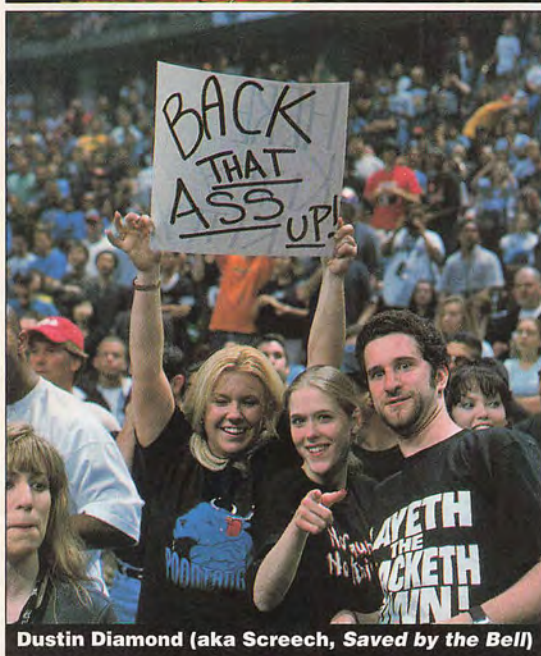
# **Federation Scores Big**

### **Signs Deal with NBC to Partner on Football League**

World Wrestling Federation Chairman Vince McMahon and NBC President Dick Ebersol were all smiles at a  New York press conference to announce details of an agreement that includes XFL games appearing on the Peacock Network on Saturday nights, beginning in February 2001.



**Vince McMahon and NBC's Dick Ebersol**



Dustin Diamond (aka Screech, *Saved by the Bell*)



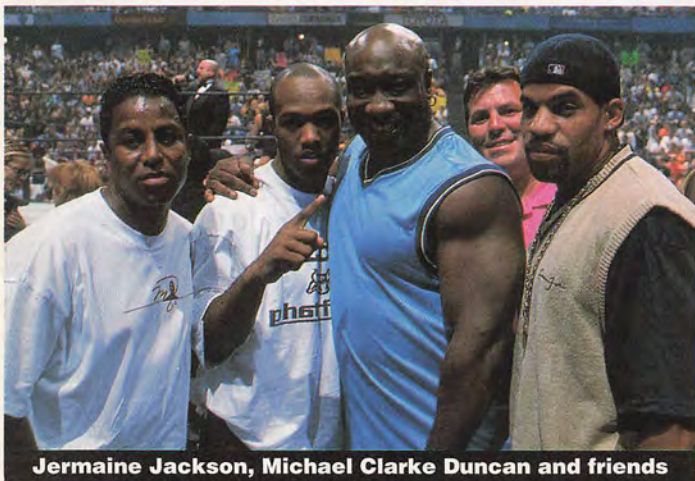
## The Fink Hits the Big 2-0

Howard Finkel Celebrates 20 Years with the Federation

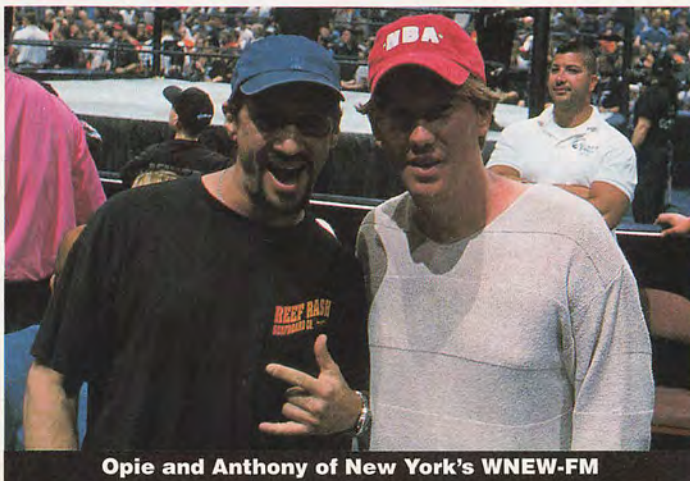
There were plenty of highlights during *WrestleMania* weekend. One of the biggest was the visit The Rock paid Stone Cold Steve Austin at the end of his *W* Axxess autograph session. (top left) Another special moment was Gerald Brisco and Bruce Prichard presenting Howard Finkel with a cake to honor his 20 years with the Federation. (above)

# an insider's view

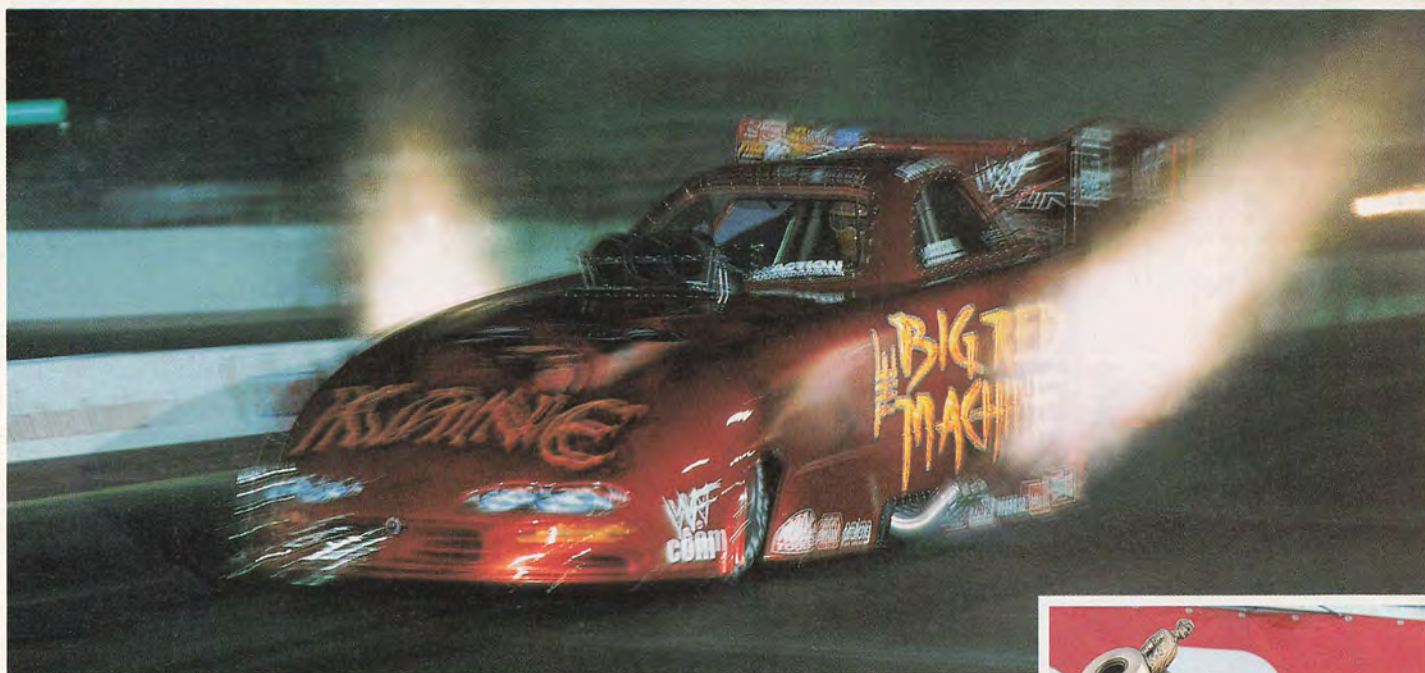
outside the ring...



Jermaine Jackson, Michael Clarke Duncan and friends



Opie and Anthony of New York's WNEW-FM

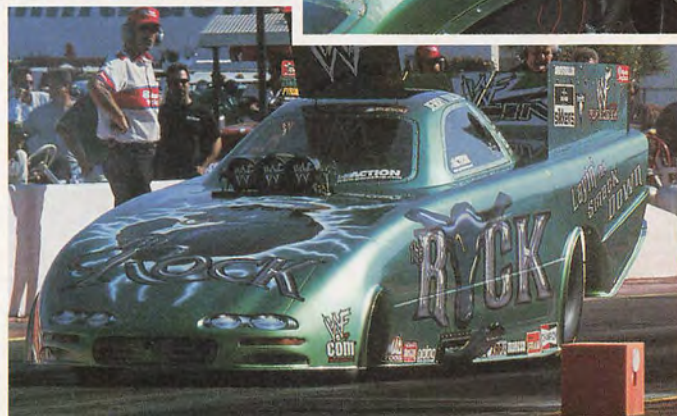


## Burning Up the Track

# Racin' Kane

## Epler Hits Jackpot in Vegas

The Federation put on a new car show in Las Vegas as Kane and The Rock cars made their racing debuts. The Kane car blistered the track, giving Jim Epler his first victory in seven years. Teammate Jerry Toliver wowed fans with his new look, too, having a helmet designed for his specially painted The Rock-mobile.

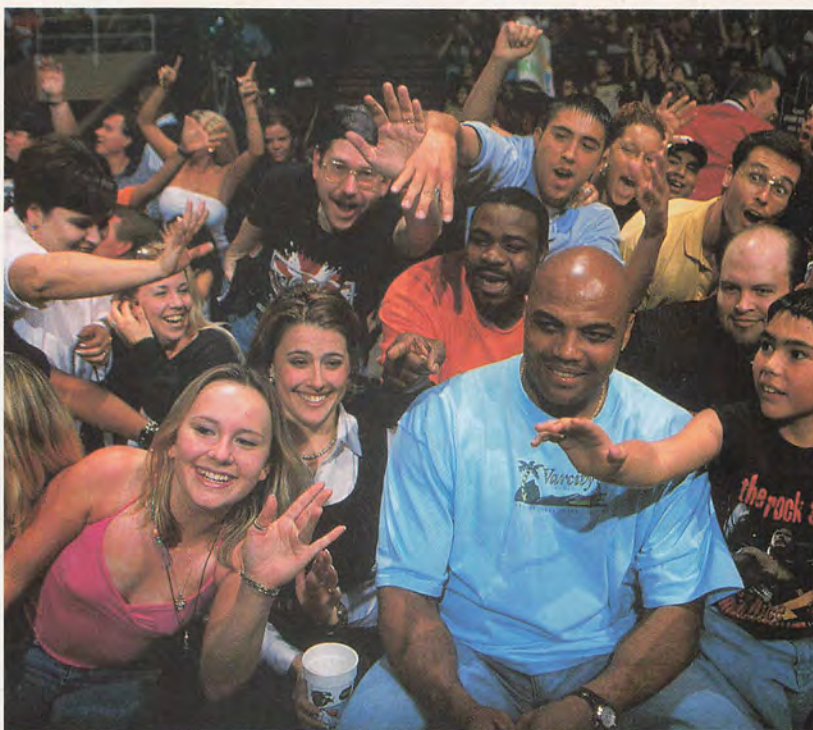


From Courtside to Ringside

# Barkley Hoops It Up

**"Sir Charles" Holds Court  
As Raw Rolls into Houston**

Here's a guy who knows a thing or two about "Attitude"! Future Basketball Hall of Famer Charles Barkley's final NBA season was curtailed by a severe knee injury, but "Sir Charles" was well enough to make it to *Raw Is War* at Houston's Compaq Center. The all-time basketball great enjoyed the Federation's finest while surrounded by his adoring fans.



# Saints Alive!

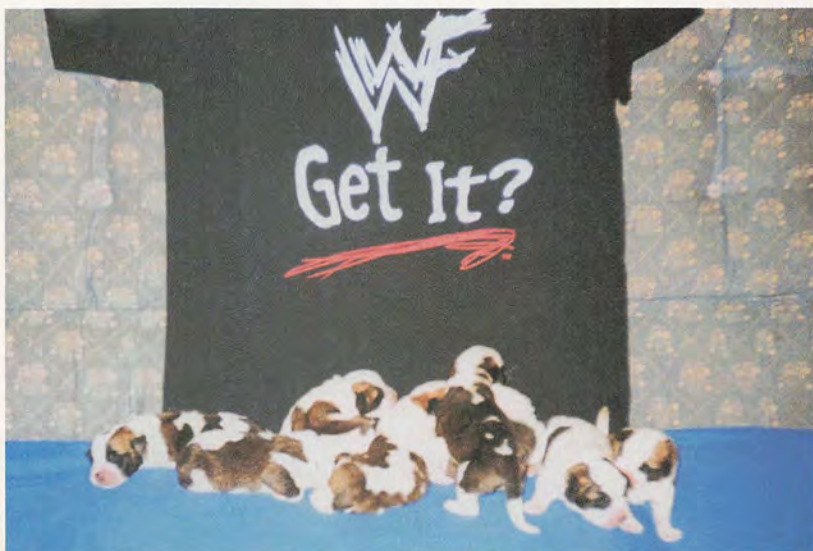
**It's Sweet 16 as Mama  
Rocks the Pup-ulation**

When Ariel went into labor in Philmont, New York, her owners, Gregg Howard and Renée Wendover, weren't expecting the battle royal of a feeding frenzy that would occur when the litter was complete.

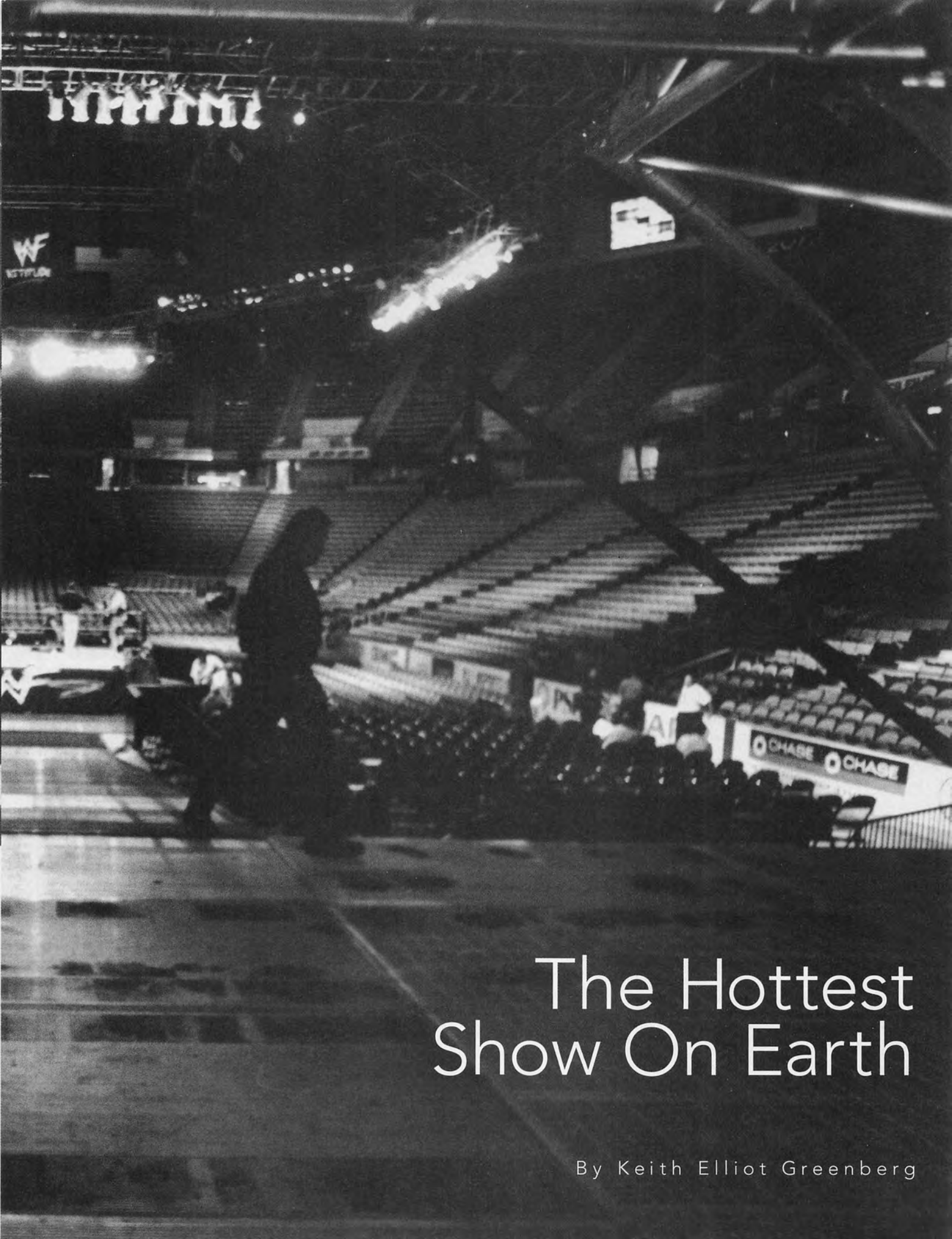
The 2-year-old Saint Bernard, however, jolted the canine community by giving birth to 16 puppies, the second-largest litter of any breed on record.

The far-reaching grip of the Federation was never more apparent as one of the dogs was christened "The Rock" because a family member is a huge fan of "the Great One."

In tribute to The Rock, Ariel donned the official sunglasses of the People's Champ while her litter brawled for all the nourishment mom could dish out.







# The Hottest Show On Earth

By Keith Elliot Greenberg



**S**cotty Too Hotty stepped off the plane from Portland, Maine, and walked briskly through New Jersey's Newark Airport towards his connecting flight to Albany, New York, where the World Wrestling Federation was holding a show that evening at the Pepsi Arena. But when the real-life Scott Taylor arrived at the gate, he spied the jet-black bristles on top of "Lethal Weapon" Steve Blackman's

head, and was suddenly filled with a sense that the day was getting complicated.

With his characteristic silence, Blackman looked up and shook his head. All flights to Albany were cancelled, and soon the two Superstars were in a rental car, rushing up the New York State Thruway to make their shot. Setting their priorities, they made two detours—to a gym for a 45-minute workout and tanning session, and to a fast-food place for lunch.

As he waited for his food, Scotty was approached by a teenager who offered to do *The Worm* in exchange for an autograph. Before Taylor could answer, the kid was on the floor of the restaurant, displaying a wiggling variation of the Superstar's dance gimmick. Scotty signed his name on a piece of paper and told the beaming youngster, "You did that better than I could."

Welcome to life behind the scenes in the World Wrestling Federation: catching flights, darting into rest stops and hanging out for hours in the dressing room, before bursting through the

curtain and transforming from a working guy into a superhero. It's a grind that might cause the average person to lose focus. But the Federation isn't for average people. And for Scotty Too Hotty, this is his destiny. When he was 14-years-old, he sent a letter to the Federation's community relations specialist, Sue Aitchison, vowing to rock arenas in the very near future. "It's the only way I ever wanted to live," he said.

Now, at the Pepsi Arena, he and other Superstars were putting on their gear and exchanging horror tales about unpredictable flight patterns. Essa Rios had come from Guadalajara, Mexico, the place he returns to every week after fulfilling his wrestling commitments. Christian flew in from Germany, where he'd been visiting his fiancée. "It was a total of 11 hours traveling," he noted. "But that's show business."

The production guys had come in the night before, cutting short their weekends to get to the site when they heard reports about troublesome weather. At 9:45 a.m., the World Wrestling Federation's 48-foot truck—containing the ring, lighting equipment and sound package—rolled up to the loading dock. Already, boards had been placed over the ice used by the American Hockey League's Albany River Rats. After that, the crew set up the ring. First came the outside frame and corner posts; then, planks were placed on beams, and covered with foam and canvas. Local stagehands positioned barricades and built the platform for the lighting director and sound mixer that would be placed just outside the dressing room curtain. Meanwhile, Federation employees fastened the ropes and turnbuckles.

"This is a pretty easy building, compared to some things we've seen," observed crew chief Tony Chimel. "The old arena in Lowell [Massachusetts] was a real pain in the butt. We'd park in the loading dock and carry all the equipment onto a stage. Then, the stage would have to be lowered onto the arena floor. But the worst was this college gymnasium in Stockton, California. You'd have to





park on the first level and walk all your equipment down through the bleachers. There was a small elevator that maybe fit two short poles at a time. Depending upon how many hands you had, it could take you two and a half hours just to unload the truck."

Today, with the World Wrestling Federation generally selling-out large, modern venues, the layout of specific arenas rarely causes problems. "It's a smooth-running show," said Steve Taylor, the Federation's vice president of event operations, "until something different is added into the mix. A mud-wrestling match or a cage match can change seating configurations, the way the trucks are loaded, roll-in times, and the number of production crew-members you'll need. Our show changes constantly, and we're constantly adjusting to keep up with it."

While local riggers hung tresses—for lighting as well as "air burst" effects during the World Wrestling Federation's pyrotechnics display—Test and Albert embraced backstage like long-lost cousins, even though they'd last seen each other only three days before. Edge fixed himself a cup of coffee while chatting with Tony Garea, a former World Wrestling Federation Tag Team Champion who, now retired, works as a "road agent," supervising the performers in the dressing room. And, when some-



one discovered there weren't enough tables for the Dudley Boyz' match later that night, a stagehand was rushed to Home Depot.

Scotty glanced at a sheet listing the night's matches, and saw that he and partner Brian Christopher (a.k.a. Grandmaster Sexay) were slated to tangle with two members of the Radicalz, Perry Saturn and Dean Malenko. The road agents would tell the performers how the match was going to end, but then it was up to them to figure out the rest.

In the ring, head pyro technician Ron Bleggi was taping a mortar full of gunpowder to a turnbuckle. "This is for Kane's match," he pointed out. "When he lowers his arms, a six- to eight-foot flame will shoot up. X-Pac has these criss-crossing comets, but we have different sizes for different-sized buildings—25-foot comets, 50-foot comets, 75-foot comets. Not too long ago in Boston, the fire marshal wouldn't let us shoot off X-Pac's pyro at all.

So things had to be rewritten. The match started before X-Pac even got to the ring, so it didn't look like there was supposed to be pyro."

Although it would be hours until show time, dozens of fans had positioned themselves along the railing of the multi-tiered parking lot behind





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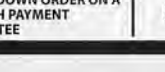
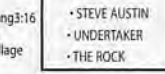
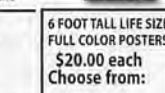
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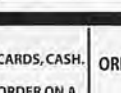
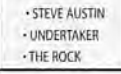
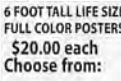
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the building, cheering wildly whenever they saw a Superstar enter the dressing room door. Christian could relate to their actions: "I can still tell you the first match I ever saw live—Paul Christy vs. King Tonga at Maple Leaf Gardens in Toronto. I got there an hour before the show, and I just stared at the ring as the arena filled up around me. I know there's some kid out there tonight who's going to have the same experience. And maybe the match he'll always remember will be mine."

In the midst of the backstage turmoil, The Godfather's "hos" changed into their tight-fitting clothes. Three of them were local dancers, but the fourth, a shapely brunette by the name of Brandy Martin, called the Federation's office herself and volunteered. "I love wrestling," she explained. "Oh my God, I've been watching it for years. I'd love to travel with The Godfather and do this permanently."

As New York State Athletic Commission doctors checked the athletes' blood pressure and examined

their eyes for concussion signs, referee Tim White contemplated the list of matches, taking note of those in which he'd be involved. Then, he walked over to the Superstars to discuss his role in their bouts. "I might not have a lot to do, but I still have to remember my parts," he said. "The boys are out there *killing* themselves, and if I miss something, it lets the air out of the match."

Finally, it was time for the first match of the night: The Godfather vs. Blackman. "Godfather, are you ready?" asked road agent Blackjack Lanza—like Garea, another retired World Wrestling Federation Tag Team Champion.

"Jack, I'm always ready," the Superstar grinned back. Glancing at the "hos," he gestured towards the dressing room curtain with his chin. "Come on, girls," he smirked. "Let's light this thing up."

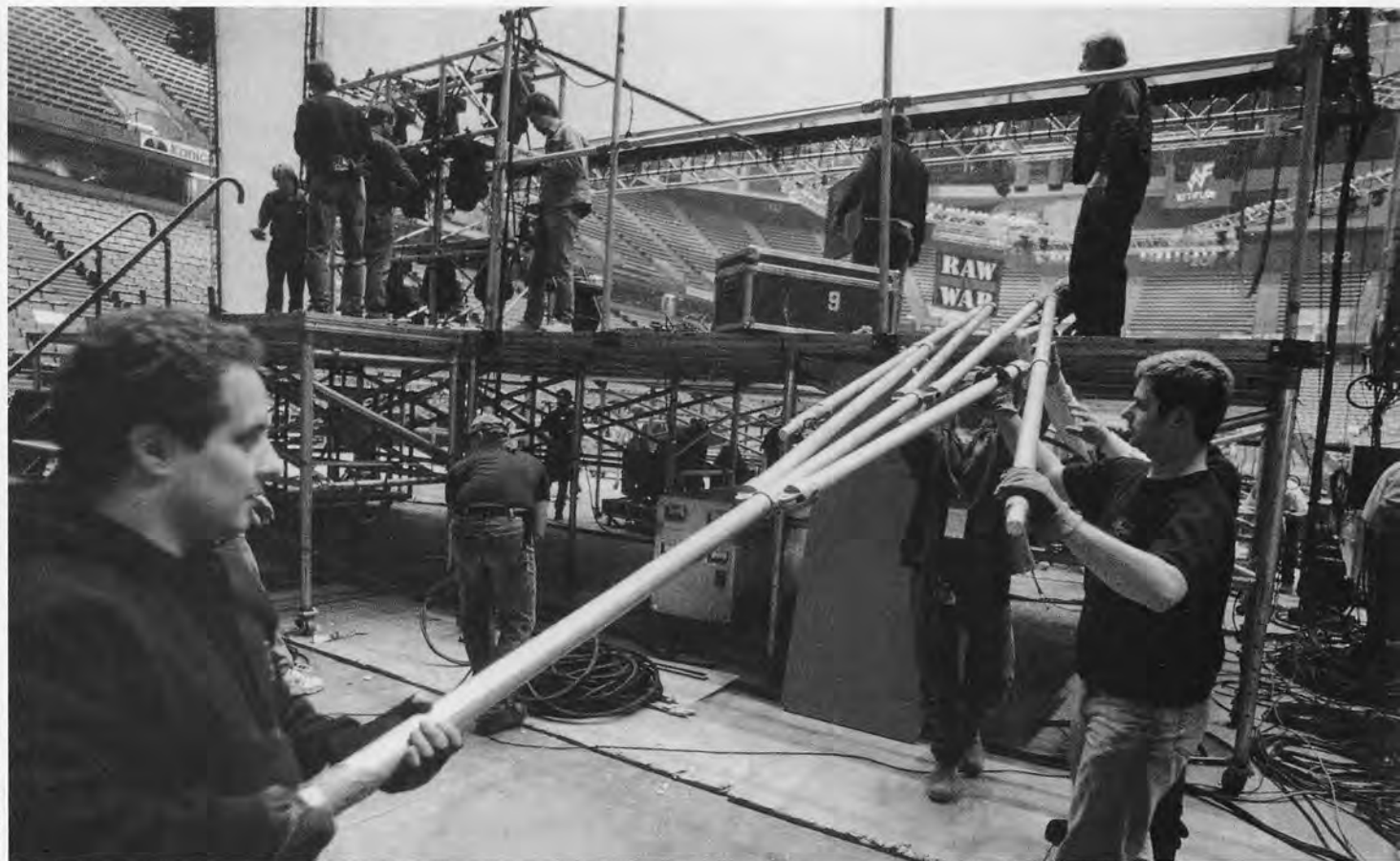
Within moments, the pyro was exploding, and The Godfather's signature speech could be heard in the dressing room: "What's up, Albannnnny?! It's time once again

for everybody to come aboard the hooooo train!"

In their own private spot, Scotty Too Hotty and Grandmaster Sexay held a brief meeting with opponents Saturn and Malenko to go over sequences. Scotty raced back and forth in the dressing room to get the blood flowing, then suddenly hit the ground and started doing push-ups. When asked if he was scared, he shot back with a smile, "No, excited."

Despite the talents of the four wrestlers, the match was remembered more for its comedy than its athleticism, particularly a series of spots featuring Grandmaster Sexay's low-hanging pants slipping down. Finally, Taylor took the loss for his team—even though Malenko was holding his opponent's trunks as the referee logged the three-count.

"You know what's funny," Scotty Too Hotty observed after returning to the dressing room. "No one cares about wins and losses. If you ask the fans what the finish was two hours from now, most won't be able to tell you. But they will remember that I did *The Worm*."



The card continued, but Scotty's thoughts had shifted from the mayhem in the ring to his strategy for getting to the next venue, the Continental Airlines Arena in New Jersey, for a live *Raw Is War* broadcast. While others were planning to drive all the way to the Garden State that night, Taylor booked a room in Newburgh, New York—the half-way point, where he'd also squeeze in a workout at Gold's Gym. His tag team partner had a different itinerary. "We never travel together," Brian Christopher

illuminated. "We tried it once, and we hated it so much that we never did it again."

Once the show ended, the lighting and pyro technicians, along with members of the production crew, clambered onto a tour bus, squeezing into bunks for the ride to New Jersey. There was no time to lose. At television tapings, the load-in time is 8:00 a.m.

In fact, everything was cranked up for *Raw Is War*. "We go on the road with eleven trucks for TV," Steve

Taylor noted, "with lights, sound, pyro, video projection equipment, the ring, barricades, backstage production office gear, backstage lighting, backstage interview gear." About 150 employees were also on hand for the trip, including ten lighting specialists, four pyro technicians, two video projectionists, a makeup artist, two seamstresses, two public relations representatives, a travel agent, seven referees and close to 50 Superstars.

At 3:00 p.m., Tom Buchanan, the World Wrestling Federation's senior staff photographer, strapped on a harness and climbed the trusses hanging above the ring, focusing the lights he'd need once the show began. Around his belt, he carried a radio-relay device, a digital computer to activate the electronic flash units on the trusses whenever the camera clicked. There would be five photographers shooting the action, including two at ringside, one taking portraits of the performers in a special dressing room studio, a "throw guy" snapping shots of backstage shenanigans, and—





on this day—a man sent to Newark Airport to chronicle a Hardcore title match brawl between Crash Holly and the Mean Street Posse in the baggage-claim area.

Scotty Too Hotty and Grandmaster Sexay were scheduled to join Rikishi Phatu in a battle against Triple H, Road

Dogg and X-Pac. Before the arena filled up, the Superstars gathered in the ring to figure out a game plan. The playfulness of the night before had diminished to a degree, now that everything was going to be broadcast live. “If you screw up on television,” Scotty stated, “everybody knows it.”



That didn’t mean the Superstars weren’t having a good time. The Rock showed off a floppy hat he wore to remain incognito in airports, as the other titans teased him. Edge walked by Dean Malenko, shouting, “Oy vey!”

“Look at that,” said the real-life Dean Simon. “You teach him one expression, and he uses it 20 times a day.”

The warriors limping into combat had plenty of assistance in rejuvenating themselves. Dr. François Petit, a *shiat-sushi* (doctor of *shiatsu*) tended to separations and sprains. Chris Brennan, a certified athletic trainer, applied hot packs, taped ankles, and ran an ultrasound device over sore muscles. Superstars waited in line for masseuse Heidi Froehlich’s services. “I get the athletes not when they’re relaxing on their days off, but when they’re in the middle of their working day,” she said. “The hours they put in are so long, and the demands they have on them are so great, this is just a way to keep them going and performing optimally.”

At 7:20 p.m.—an hour and 40 minutes before show time—road production assistant Brandon Stern photocopied the latest version of the night’s script. Announcer Michael Cole leafed through pages, reviewing the twists and turns of various feuds. Brian Gewirtz—one of four show writers charged with conceptualizing storylines with World Wrestling Federation head Vince McMahon—shouted at a technician, “Hey, want to dress up like Abraham Lincoln?”

“Why?”

“For an Al Snow-Steve Blackman bit.”

“Nah.”

“Come on. You’re tall. We need you.”

“Okay.”

As the man affixed a false beard, Gewirtz commented, “This job is really all-encompassing. I was at a Billy Joel concert on New Year’s Eve, and all I kept thinking was, ‘What would happen if the Boss Man attacked him now?’”

The show began, with the Superstars backstage watching the proceedings on a dressing room monitor, placing their

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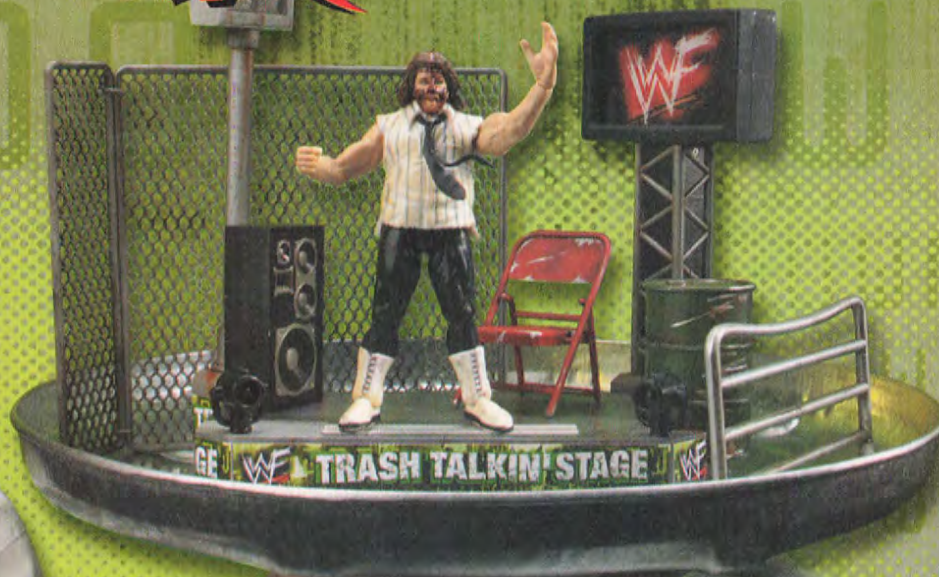
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fingers in their ears as the pyro erupted. "There are more explosions than at any concert," maintained Ron Bleggi, the head pyro technician. "During the first eight seconds of *Raw*, we have literally 130 effects—fireballs, sparks, live rockets."

In a control room set up in a large trailer outside the building, executive producer Kevin Dunn literally programmed the barrage, shouting over his headphones, "One, two, three, let's have

the pyro." He hesitated a moment, then looked at the bank of monitors in front of him—displaying the vantage points from eight cameras positioned throughout the Continental Airlines Arena—and realized that Stephanie McMahon was nowhere to be seen. "We're going live to the McMahon-Helmsley room," he yelled. "If anyone sees Stephanie, get her in there."

For reasons no one could discern, Kurt Angle had been told not to rip on

New Jersey in his pre-match monologue. "Vince doesn't like New Jersey jokes," shrugged the 1996 Olympic gold medalist. "So I have to come up with something that pisses off the crowd, but doesn't piss off Vince. Maybe I'll say, 'New Jersey needs a hero, and no, Bon Jovi doesn't count.'"

Scotty Too Hotty hit the ring with his partners, prompting the audience to holler for *The Worm*. Taylor soon gave the fans what they wanted, writhing on the canvas before slinging X-Pac and Triple H into the corner and bodyslamming the Road Dogg. But, like the night before, Scotty's squad dropped the match—this time when Rikishi got zapped by X-Pac with the ring bell and then pinned by Triple H.

Afterwards, both teams convened in the dressing room. Scotty shook hands with the Road Dogg. Rikishi and X-Pac embraced. After offering suggestions about ways they could have improved the flow of the match, the group dispersed. Scotty headed for his hotel in Newark, New Jersey, an hour or so away from the Nassau Coliseum on Long Island, where the World Wrestling Federation was taping *SmackDown!* the next night.

By the third day of the tour, everyone was becoming a little delirious. Said vice president of event operations Steve Taylor, "The weirdest feeling is sleeping on the tour bus and waking up outside the arena in the parking lot, and having no idea where you are."

But that sense of detachment from the rest of society is something all the participants share, and almost certainly contributes to the unique friendships the Superstars enjoy. "It takes a very rare person to subject himself to this way of life," said masseuse Heidi Froehlich. "There's a lot of wear and tear emotionally from being in different places every day. But this is a sweet, healthy group. And when you spend time with the Superstars, you see that they have very loving friendships. It's refreshing to be with such a warm bunch of people."

When Scotty Too Hotty looked at





the scheduled matches at the Nassau Coliseum, he received a pleasant surprise. He was going to be featured in a singles bout against Essa Rios, to be taped for the USA Network's *Sunday Night Heat* before the taping of *SmackDown!* began. Soon, the youthful wrestlers were in the ring, charting the course of the battle.

"It's pretty hard, because he mainly speaks Spanish," Taylor said. "In a match, you might be able to communicate simple things like, 'Give me an elbow.' But there's a lot he won't understand."

Writer Gewirtz found himself running back and forth to Vince McMahon's office, as the honcho revised the night's script. "Writing for *SmackDown!* is really very similar to *Raw*," Gewirtz said. "You can get away with more stuff on cable, but the mood,

the feelings we convey, are almost identical."

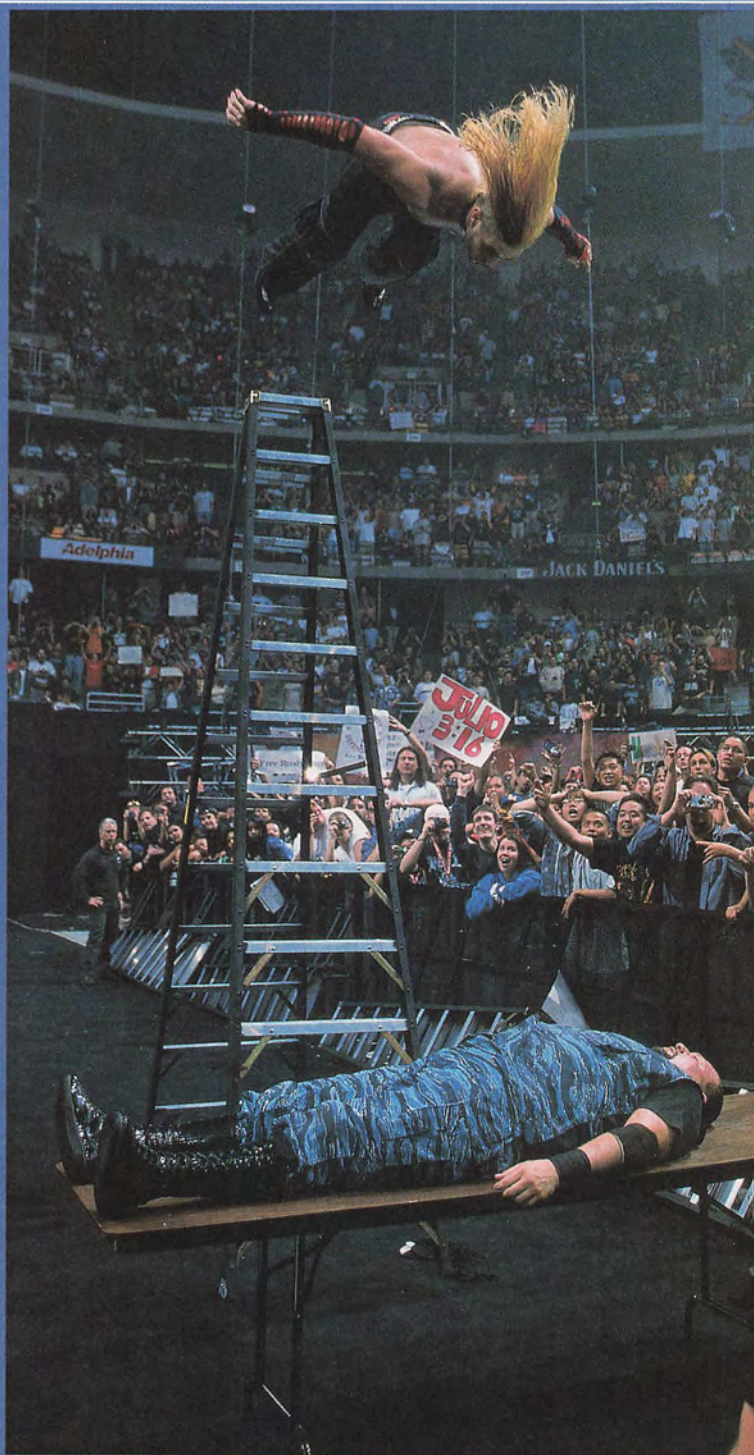
Although Scotty Too Hotty's match was not recorded for *SmackDown!*, it fascinated the fans nonetheless. Both athletes put everything into the encounter. Rios delivered a flying headscissors and senton splash onto the arena floor. But when he missed a moonsault, Scotty executed a bulldog headlock, popped the crowd by doing *The Worm*, and got his first victory in three nights with a tornado DDT.

As soon as all of the matches ended, the clean-up crew moved in, placing garbage in bags, stacking folding chairs onto racks. The ring was dismantled, its components placed onto carts and wheeled across the arena floor to waiting trucks. Slowly, the lighting trusses were lowered from the ceiling. In the quiet of the emptying dressing room,

Vince McMahon received a *shiatsu* treatment from Dr. Petit, while the rest of the talent scattered in separate directions—Perry Saturn to Atlanta, Tori to Washington, DC, Christian to Toronto.

Scotty Too Hotty turned the ignition of his rental car, and finally admitted that he was tired. Even though he was going home the next day, there would be no slowing down. The next week was going to be even more grueling, starting on Saturday, and going all the way to Wednesday. But when Taylor felt like griping, he remembered the letter he wrote at age 14 to the World Wrestling Federation, and put everything in perspective. "There are a million guys out there who want to be here," he said. "And there are only about 100 of us who remember what it was like to be part of that million and we don't want to be there again." ■

By Robert J. Bledsoe



**It reads like a laundry list of items to be picked up at the**

**local pharmacy:** heating pad, pain cream and aspirin. But it's not a prescription for a social security or Medicare recipient; these are items used by Edge and Christian, the Hardy Boyz and the Dudley Boyz just one day after their thrilling Triangle Ladder Match for the Tag Team Championship at this year's *WrestleMania*.

"I had to roll out of bed to begin with," says Matt Hardy. "Still, I've got a huge bruise on the right side of my back, butt and thigh. Also, my shoulder was bothering me a little bit. My knee was real sore; that was the major thing. Plus, I got all cut up from the very last table I went through—when they [Edge and Christian] pushed me off the table that was stacked on top of the ladders."

# soar sports

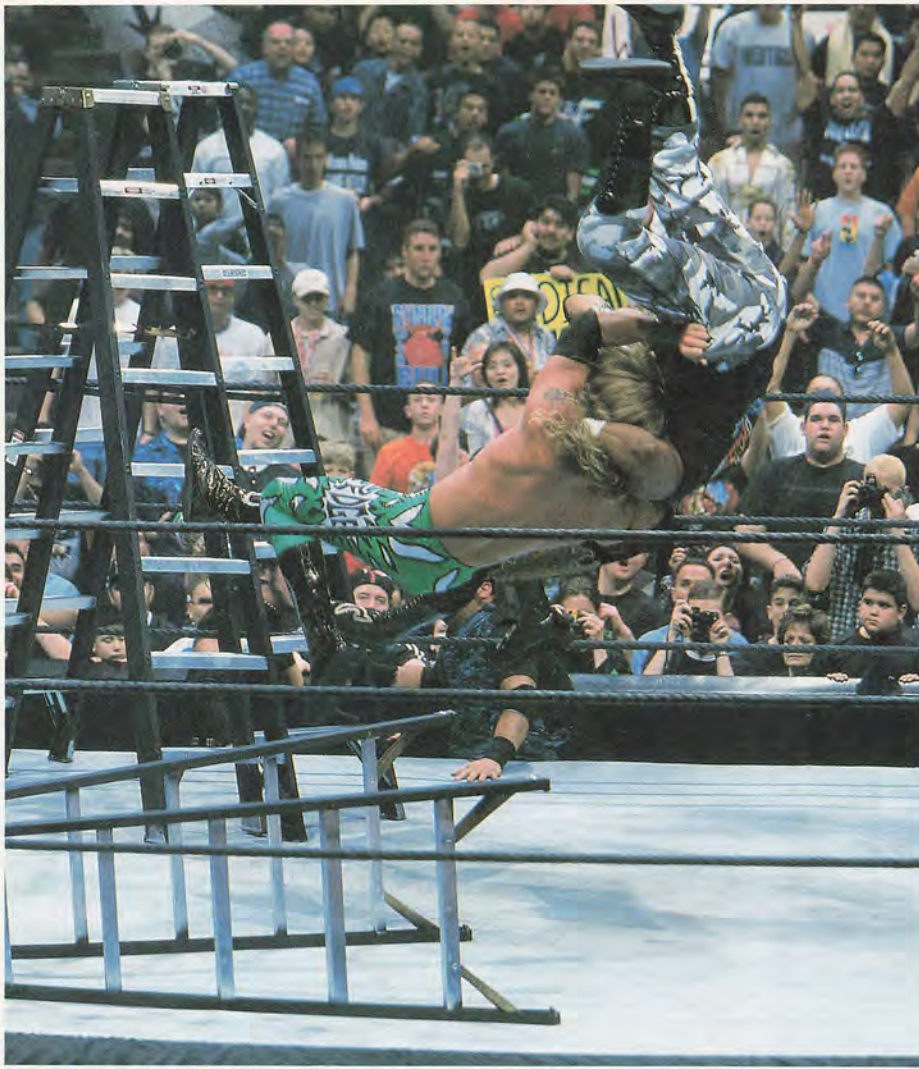
"Whenever I go through a table it explodes," continues Matt. "This one sliced me up pretty good. So, I was extremely sore, to say the least. But in actuality, I was more sore Tuesday than I was Monday."

It was the *WrestleMania* debut for Matt and the other five Superstars involved in the Triangle Ladder Match. And it's one that none of them—or Federation fans—are likely to forget.

Nicked with bumps and bruises, but no broken bones or other major injuries, all three teams have no reservations in admitting that their *WrestleMania* rendezvous was one of the most physically taxing matches they've ever participated in.

"I was in ECW for four-and-a-half years. We had a lot of matches, barbed wire and everything like that. This was the first time that





Buh-Buh and I had really been in an actual ladder match,” says D-Von Dudley. “We used the ladder in ECW, but never to this extent—never to where we were actually climbing up to get a belt or using them in spots and things like that. That was new to us. I think it was one of the most grueling matches we’ve ever been in. Parts of my body hurt that I never knew could hurt.”

Considering D-Von doesn’t like heights, his stellar performance in the Triangle Ladder Match is impressive. Facing his fear (plus some taunting and teasing backstage from fellow Superstars), D-Von knew that everything was on the line at his first *WrestleMania*. Thinking, “Oh, my God! Oh, my God! Please let this be over,” as he climbed each rung, D-Von put on his best face, masking his anxiety in an effort to entertain the

nearly 20,000 fans in attendance at Anaheim, California’s Arrowhead Pond, as well as the millions more watching at home on pay-per-view.

“I can’t even put it into words,” says D-Von. “The fear was there. But, then again, it was *WrestleMania*.”

It was the love of the game and the love of sports-entertainment’s biggest annual spectacle that helped D-Von suppress his fears. But even for the biggest daredevil of them all—Jeff Hardy—blocking out thoughts of what could go wrong wasn’t an option; it was an impossibility.

“I’m nervous before every match until I get in the ring and get physical,” says Jeff. “I don’t know why. I guess that’s a good thing because it shows true love for what you’re doing. Just because you want to do so well, there’s always a fear of messing up or goofing up, or people laughing at

you—especially with the things that I do [like] running up the ropes or trying to jump and balance without using my hands.

“There’s always a good chance of slipping. Especially before this match, I knew that so many people were watching,” continues Jeff. “I knew that there were some things I was going to attempt in this match that could go seriously wrong. I was really worried about that.”

So, when Jeff Hardy ascended a steel ladder outside the ring, in the middle of the rampway and without the pads surrounding the ring, fans were equally worried. The idea was to jump from an unseemly height atop a ladder onto a prone Buh-Buh Ray, who was lying on a table. Some fans “ooh-ed” and “ah-ed.” Some watched silently amazed. Still others, without the stomach to witness the leap, turned their heads aside and shut their eyes.

As screaming fans cheered their approval, Jeff Hardy gave them his trademark hand signal, assuring the audience that what was about to happen was for them. With that, he leapt down with a “swanton bomb” onto a helpless Buh-Buh Ray, breaking the table in half. Grimacing in pain, it looked as though Jeff’s lower back might have been injured. Remarkably, he suffered only bruised heels and a stiff neck.

“Honestly, I wanted to steal the show,” laughs Jeff. “That’s how I am all the time. I think that’s a good thing. I think we all did. So, we went out there and gave it our all and our best.”

The desire to put on the best possible performance for Federation fans was a common thread running through each of the participants’ post-*WrestleMania* comments. For Christian, in particular, there was the challenge of meeting or surpassing his first ladder match with Edge against the Hardy’s at last year’s *No Mercy*, a match many credit with launching both teams’ careers. As Christian saw it, he could not afford to have the match be a case of “one step



forward and two steps back.”

“I felt a lot of pressure to live up to the first [ladder match] we had,” says Christian. “I was really nervous about that because I wanted it to be on par with the first one. After it was done, I was very satisfied because I had the

feeling that it was on the same level. [However,] it was a lot more difficult because there were two extra bodies. And there were more ladders and tables in this match. So, there was more to be aware of in the ring. If you’re taking a bump, falling, there’s

a higher risk factor.”

Six ladders and four tables later, *WrestleMania* has come and gone. Edge and Christian, the Hardy Boyz and the Dudley Boyz have now cemented a place for themselves in the history books of the World Wrestling Federation thanks to their Triangle Ladder Match. And while D-Von Dudley prefers conventional matches and Christian doesn’t mind a grinding gimmick match every once in a while, the Hardyz take pleasure in the thrill of victory and the agony of “da-feet” from such matches. With hurt heels and all, the Hardyz would have it no other way and look forward to more.

“The fans are probably what keep me going and always make me get back up,” says Jeff Hardy. “There’s just something about a reaction that’s so strong and powerful from 10,000 or 20,000 people. It just drives me crazy. I love it!” ■



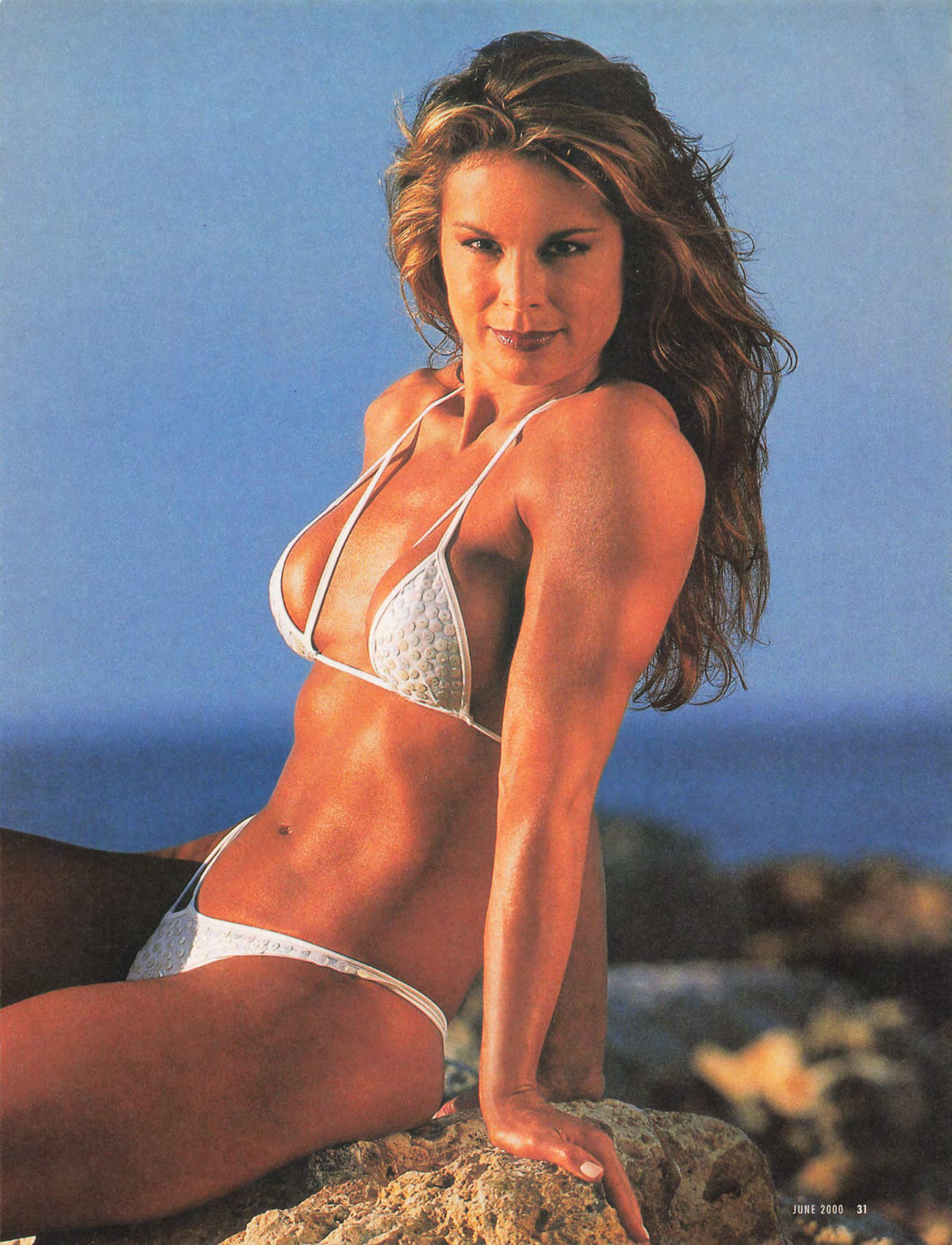
Photography by: Tom Buchanan, Rich Freeda and David McLain

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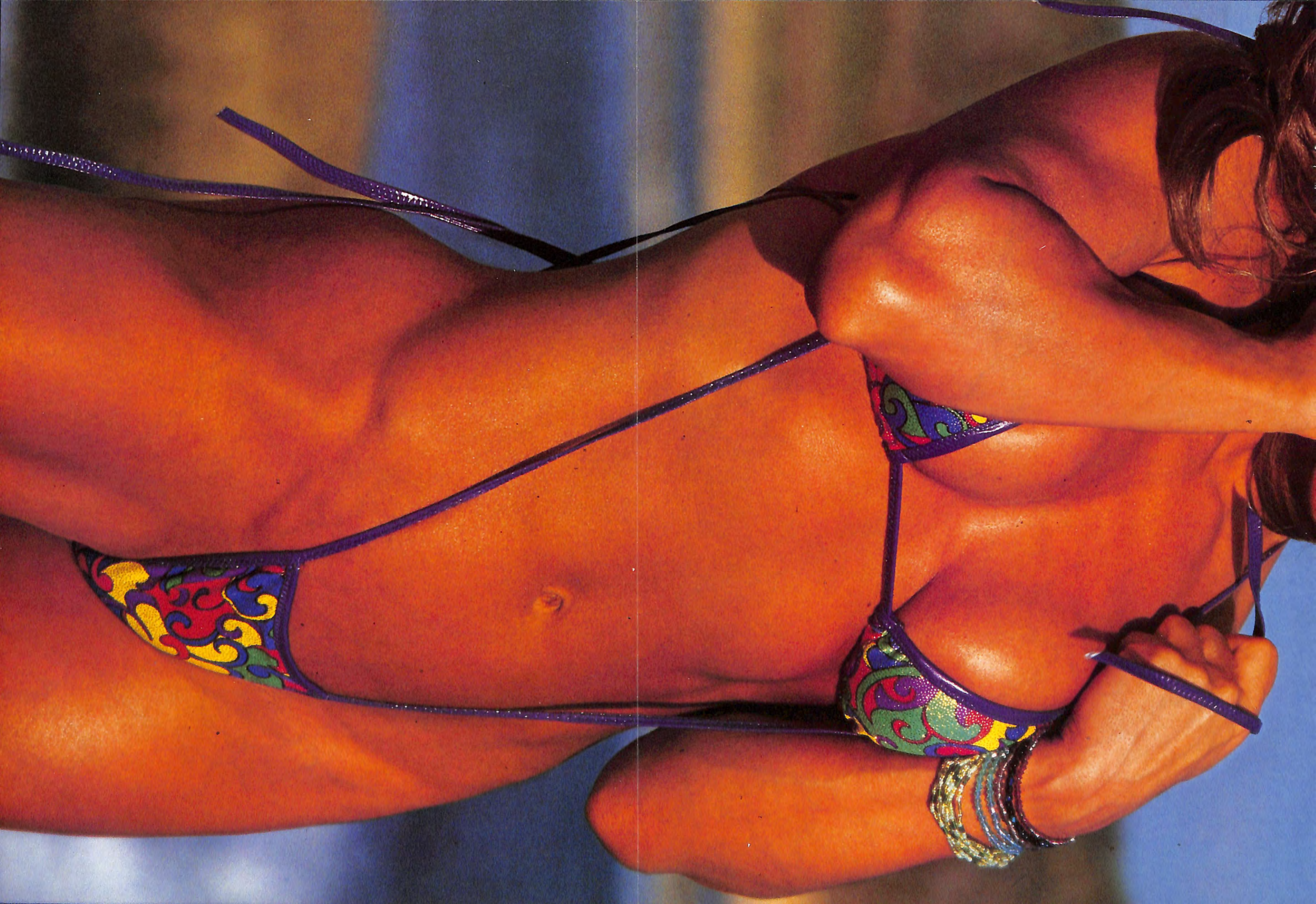








(Left) There's nothing better than a little "fore" play.  
(Above) Too bad there isn't room in your luggage to bring home this souvenir.









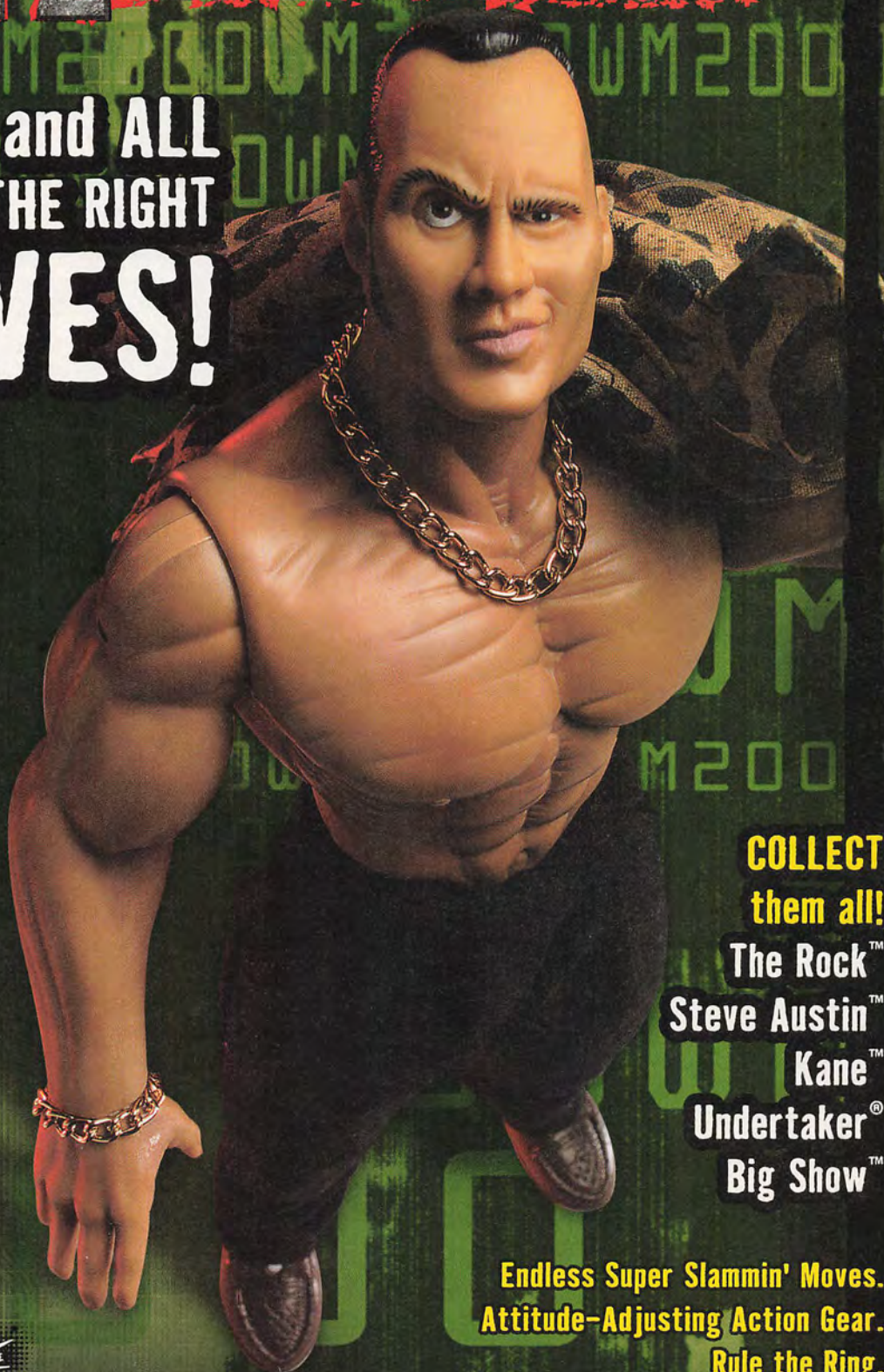


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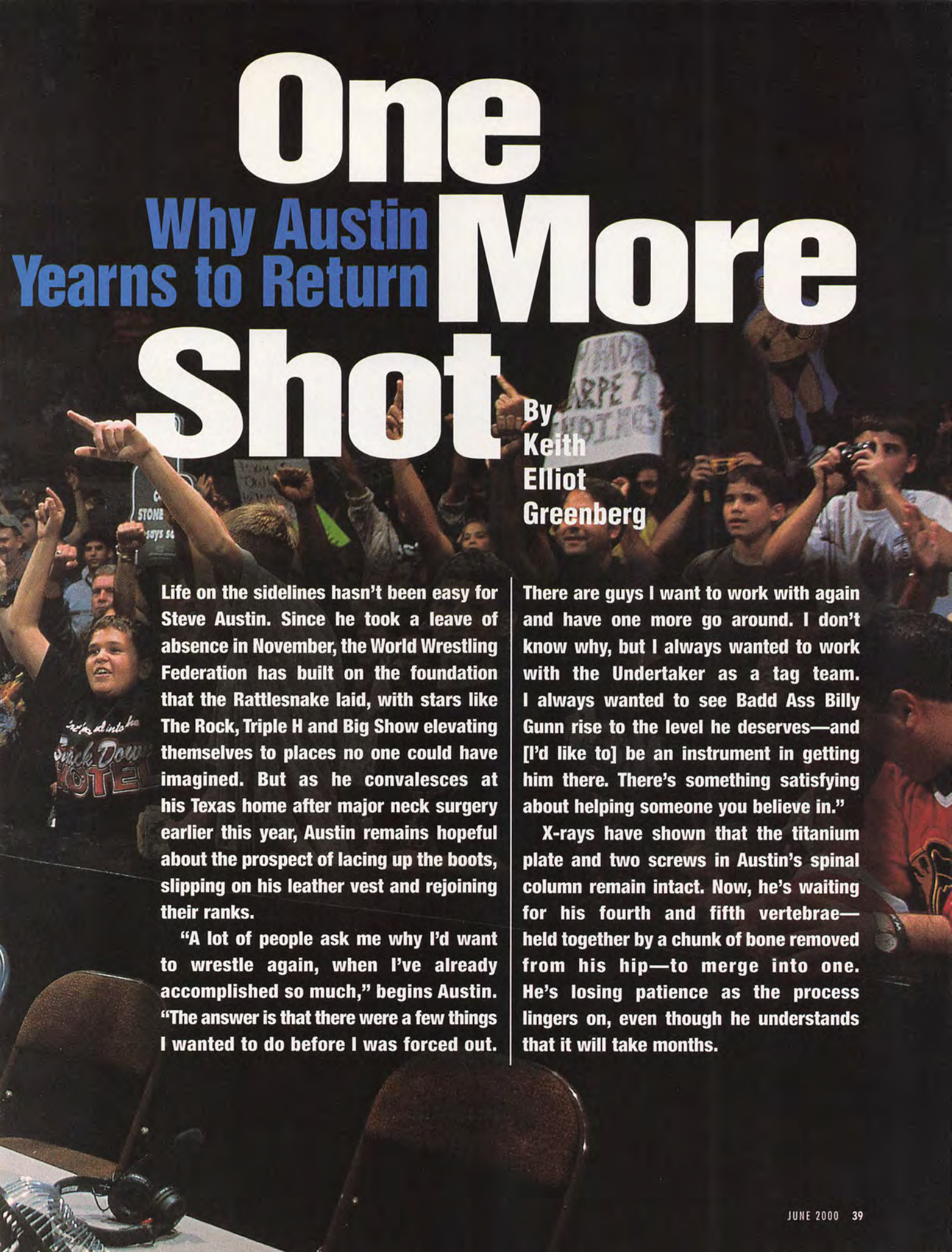
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# One More Shot



Why Austin  
Yearns to Return

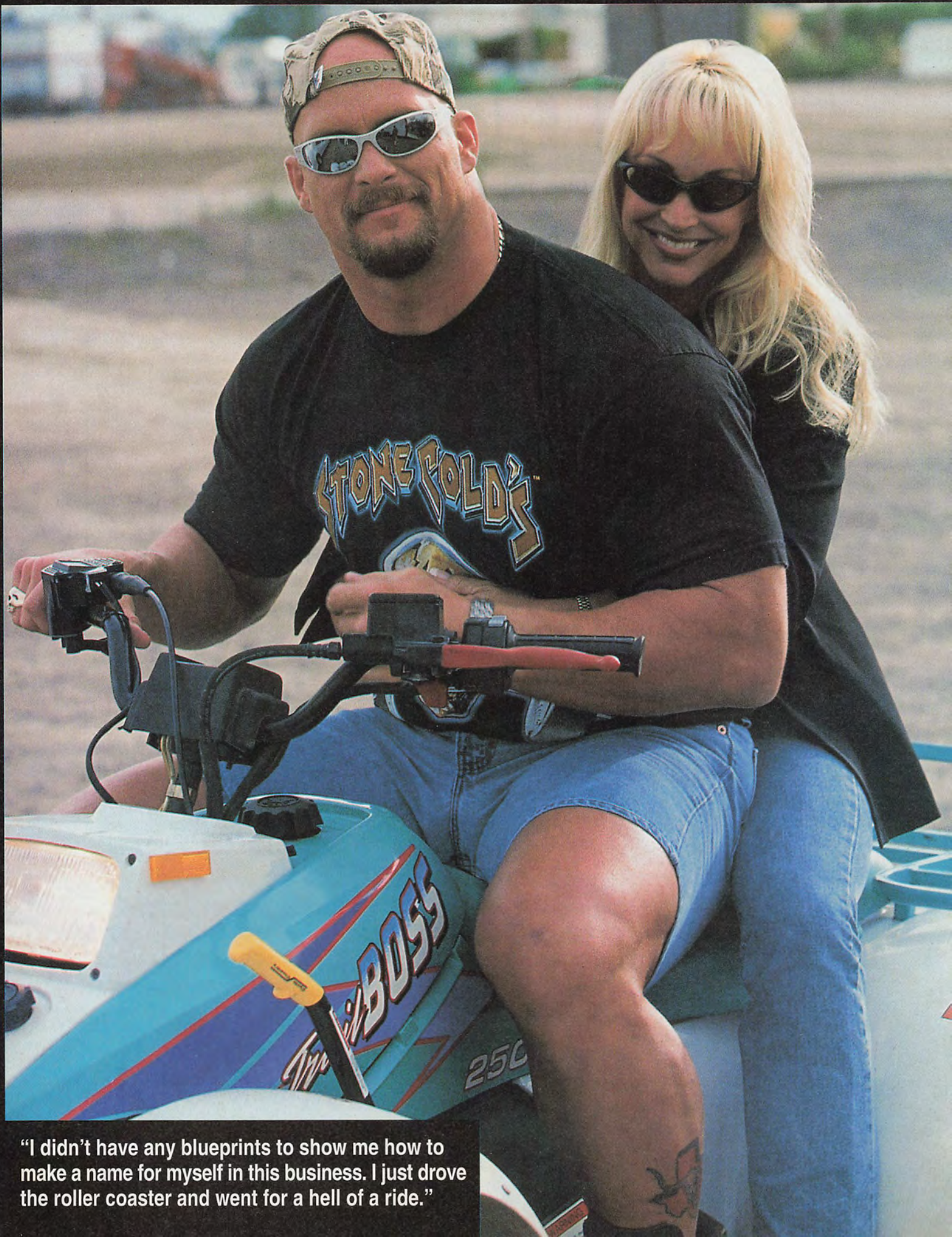
By  
Keith  
Elliot  
Greenberg

Life on the sidelines hasn't been easy for Steve Austin. Since he took a leave of absence in November, the World Wrestling Federation has built on the foundation that the Rattlesnake laid, with stars like The Rock, Triple H and Big Show elevating themselves to places no one could have imagined. But as he convalesces at his Texas home after major neck surgery earlier this year, Austin remains hopeful about the prospect of lacing up the boots, slipping on his leather vest and rejoining their ranks.

"A lot of people ask me why I'd want to wrestle again, when I've already accomplished so much," begins Austin. "The answer is that there were a few things I wanted to do before I was forced out.

There are guys I want to work with again and have one more go around. I don't know why, but I always wanted to work with the Undertaker as a tag team. I always wanted to see Badd Ass Billy Gunn rise to the level he deserves—and [I'd like to] be an instrument in getting him there. There's something satisfying about helping someone you believe in."

X-rays have shown that the titanium plate and two screws in Austin's spinal column remain intact. Now, he's waiting for his fourth and fifth vertebrae—held together by a chunk of bone removed from his hip—to merge into one. He's losing patience as the process lingers on, even though he understands that it will take months.



"I didn't have any blueprints to show me how to make a name for myself in this business. I just drove the roller coaster and went for a hell of a ride."

"My doctor's very, very conservative," Austin notes. "I tend to think that I'll heal faster than he says."

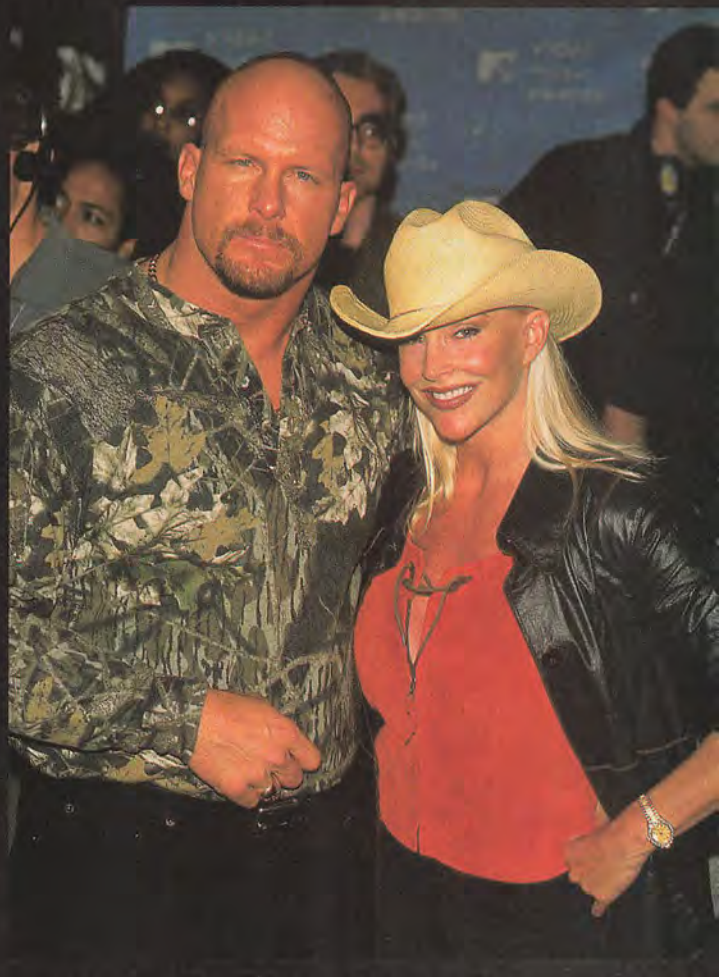
The most encouraging words the former World Wrestling Federation Champion hears usually come from his fiancée Debra, the shapely valet who took a leave of absence from the Federation to nurse her future husband back to his old form. "He's been going through a lot of stress," she says. "He really needed someone to help him stay positive and spring back. I care about him a lot and didn't want him going through this by himself."

In March, Austin experienced a breakthrough: His neck brace was removed. "Actually," he admits, "I'd taken it off a couple of days prior to the doctor telling me so." When he gazed into the mirror, though, he felt frustrated: "I didn't look the way Stone Cold Steve Austin did when he was wrestling. I put on a few pounds. Now, I'm doing curls with very light weights, and I'm planning to start light leg presses, calf exercises, leg extensions and leg curls soon. It's going to be so good to be working out again. To sit around like this, anyone would get in a depressed state. I'm looking forward to feeling strong, getting a pump back, having some muscle tone."

During his months recuperating at home, Austin has kept himself busy by talking to friends in the industry—The Rock, Triple H, Kane and Mick Foley, as well as the Undertaker, who's also been rehabbing from injuries. He has also been supervising a number of projects on his 118-acre spread, including the installation of a game fence and two stock tanks. The construction workers clearing the cedar off his land occasionally stop their bulldozers and ask for autographs. Austin is happy to oblige, even though he'd rather be signing programs at the arena.

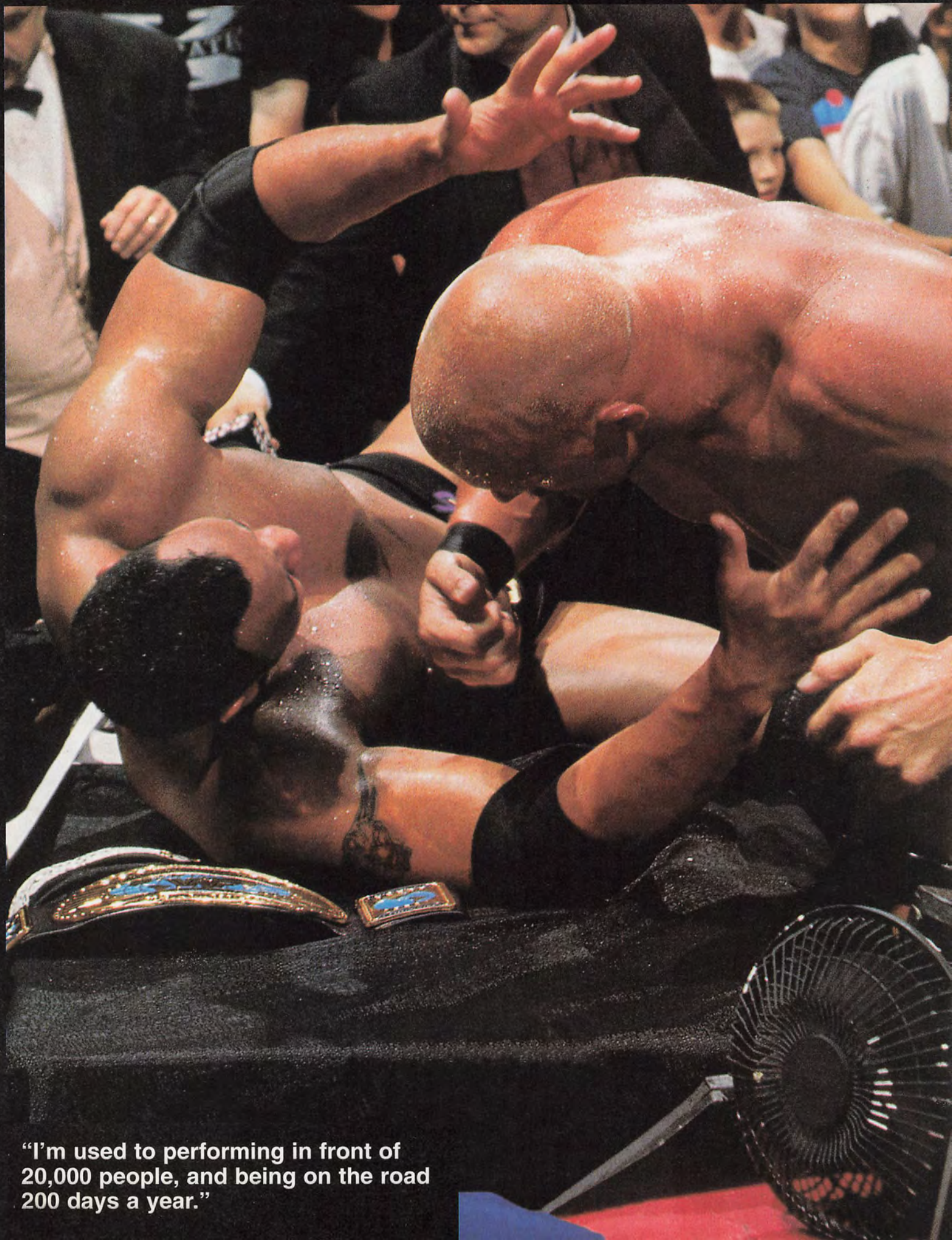
"I'm used to performing in front of 20,000 people, and being on the road 200 days a year," he says. "These construction guys are pretty cool, but I'm still bored."

With plenty of time on his hands, Austin often finds himself remembering the long road he traveled—through the now-defunct World Class promotion, World Championship Wrestling (WCW) and Extreme Championship Wrestling (ECW)—before finally having the chance to exhibit his talents in the World Wrestling Federation, and evolve into arguably the most celebrated wrestler in history.



"I didn't have any blueprints to show me how to make a name for myself in this business. I just drove the roller coaster and went for a hell of a ride," he recounts. "But it wasn't just me. It was [World Wrestling Federation head] Vince McMahon, and so many other people I worked with. You can headline a card, but it's everyone involved on that card who makes a show. I'm talking about the wrestlers in the other matches who build up excitement before the main event, the referees, the road agents [ex-wrestlers who work with the performers behind the scenes], even guys like J.R. [announcer Jim Ross] putting me over on the microphone."

Still, his mind always drifts back to *SummerSlam '97*, and his opponent Owen Hart picking him up, turning him upside down, and readying him for the piledriver. As the cheers of the audience enveloped the two gladiators, something went wrong, and Austin's head crashed into the mat. "I knew I was in big trouble as soon as I landed," Austin reminisces. "I couldn't move anything. I told the referee that something was wrong."



**"I'm used to performing in front of 20,000 people, and being on the road 200 days a year."**



Owen Hart had been slated to lose the Intercontinental strap to the Rattlesnake that night, and fulfilled his end of the bargain, positioning himself for Austin to drape his body over him and score the win. "I remember they picked me up off the mat under my armpits," Stone Cold says. "I was really taking off as a babyface [fan favorite] at that time, and I wanted to acknowledge the crowd. My legs were dragging under me. Both of my shoulders were on fire; I was in unbelievable pain. But I managed to lift my arms, and let the fans know I won."

"When I was taken to the back, I was very emotional, and I'm not ashamed to tell you I was afraid," he continues, "But at least I was able to stand when I left the ring, and that made me happy."

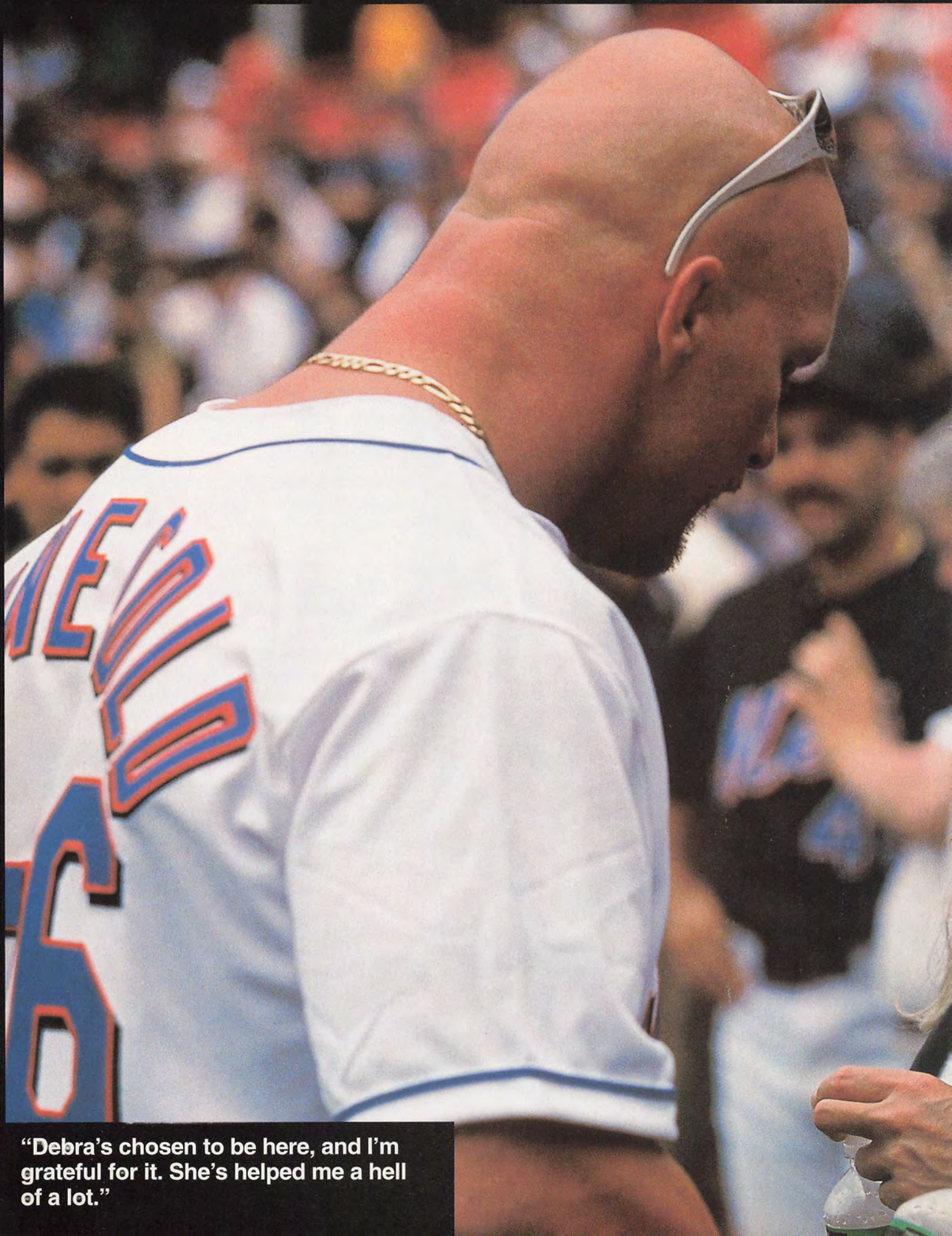
Immediately after the accident, the new Intercontinental titlist was placed in an ambulance and rushed to the hospital. X-rays and a CAT scan showed nothing significant. But subsequent MRIs revealed a bruised spinal cord. "You know, what we do out there is such a calculated risk, and the slightest miscalculation can be a disaster," Austin observes. "Today, when I see someone fixing to take a bad fall on his head, I turn away. I can't even watch."

Yet, Austin continues to view the tape of his own accident over and over again. "I really don't know why I keep watching it," he admits. "It's almost a way of explaining to myself why I'm sitting here when I should be in that ring with everybody else. I just watch the videotape and tell myself, 'That's the way it goes.'"

In the weeks following the injury, nearly every doctor Austin visited advised him to retire. Finally, he found a specialist willing to allow him in the ring—but only under certain conditions. "I was told to avoid certain moves," Austin clarifies. "So, I improvised."

Austin's best moments in the ring were still ahead. He'd win the World Wrestling Federation Heavyweight Championship four times, but the neck injury still plagued him. "Steve couldn't understand the numbness in his arms," Debra remembers. "It was Dr. Lloyd Youngblood who provided the answers."

The Superstar chose Youngblood to perform the delicate surgery in January, and continues to consult with him. Debra accompanies her fiancé to every visit. "Some people think that I told her I didn't want her traveling with the World Wrestling Federation, that I wanted her to stay with me,"



**"Debra's chosen to be here, and I'm grateful for it. She's helped me a hell of a lot."**



Austin says. "But the people who really know me understand that I would never hold her back. If Debra told me she wanted to go back on the road, that's fine. She's chosen to be here, and I'm grateful for it. She's helped me a hell of a lot."

Observes Debra, "At first, I thought, 'Wow! I have a break.' But this business gets in your blood and you miss it. And I miss Chyna, and the other good friends I've made. I worked hard to become one of the top females in the World Wrestling Federation. And now that Steve is getting better, I can't wait to be in front of the crowds again."

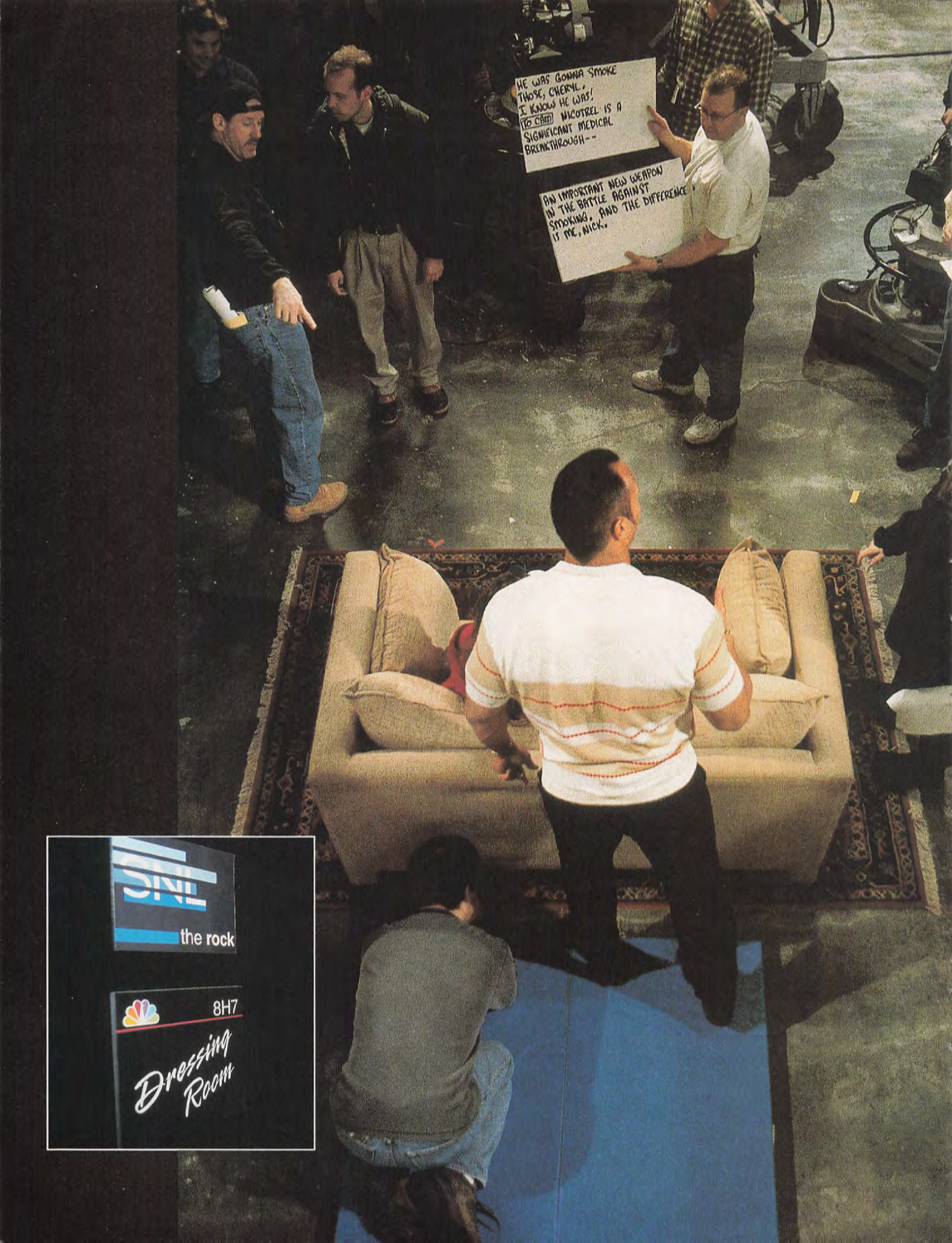
That's when Debra says she'll consider taking their relationship to the next level: "When we're both back at the arena, life will be normal for us, and we'll start planning our wedding. Right now, everything's off-key."

During Austin's and Debra's absence, other World Wrestling Federation Superstars have been filling the void left behind by these two dynamic performers. But still, it's hard for him being away from the crowd. "I haven't watched the show since I've been home," he discloses. "It's because I didn't leave on my terms, and I still want to be in the main event. It's too hard to be away from it, sitting here on my ass."

"I'm not jealous that business is booming and other wrestlers are enjoying the spotlight. If a great running back is injured, the NFL continues. But I wish I was there, pulling the wagon."

Even though Austin has been virtually invisible to the wrestling public, he is far from forgotten. "Whenever I visit the doctor, he hands me a stack of fan mail," the Rattlesnake says. "It amazes me that fans send fan mail to my doctor's office. But I appreciate it. I'm touched that so many people in so many places are thinking about me and praying for me. And I wish I could write each and every one of them and say, 'Thank you.'"

Still, Austin would rather show his gratitude by giving the fans what they really want, a wild brawl at their hometown arena, culminating with a Stone Cold Stunner. "I know that day is going to happen, and I want it to be sooner rather than later," he says. "It's like someone pushed a pause button on the VCR that's been my life. I want to press the play button, then the fast forward button, and become Stone Cold Steve Austin again." ■




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the rock



8H7

*Dressing Room*

By Mike Fazioli

# KNOWING HIS ROLES

The Rock Rolls Into "30 Rock" to Deliver a Hot SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE Performance



CRITICS are tough, especially these days, when you get a lot more mileage out of ripping someone apart than you do out of praising their effort. So when it was announced that The Rock would be the guest host of NBC's *Saturday Night Live* on March 18, the critics' fangs were sharpened and readied. A sports-entertainer trying his hand at comedy, and in front of a live TV audience? The skeptics spoke early and often, warning of the

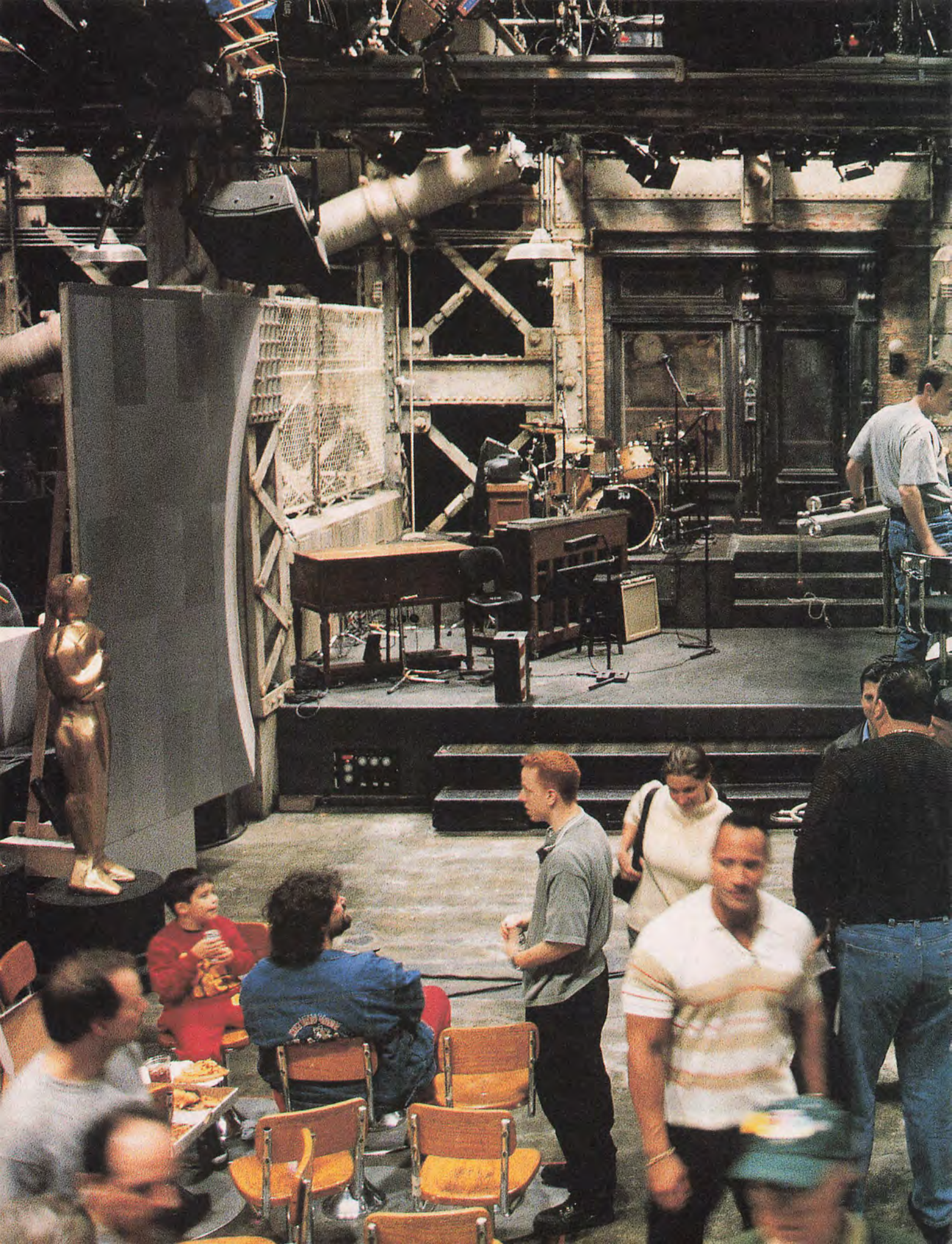
bomb about to go off. Aside from cheap, physical slapstick, what could The Rock possibly bring to the table?

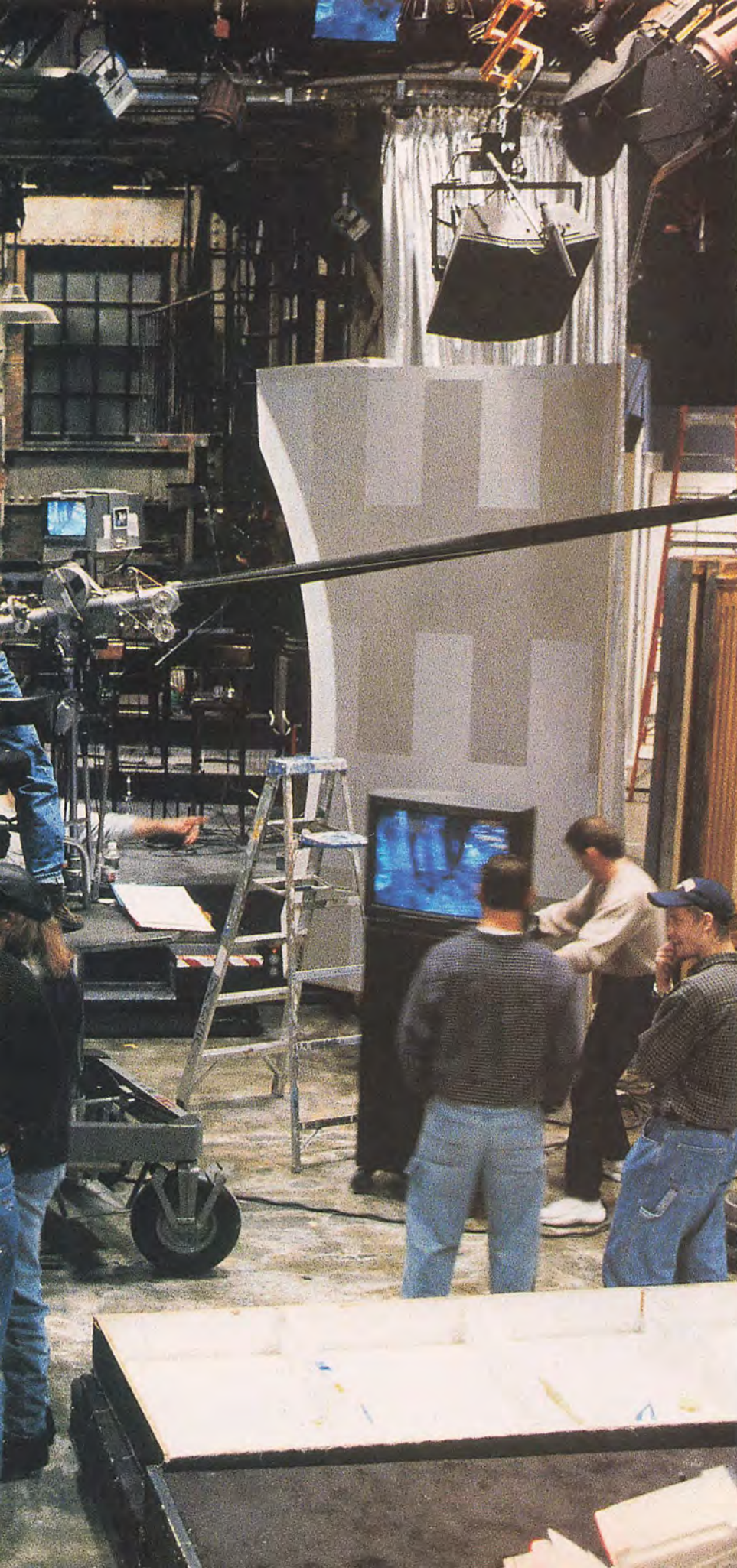
But when the man who made "know your role" a household expression stepped up to the mic and showed that, yes, he did know his roles—at least a half-dozen of them—suddenly, the skeptics got real quiet.

To say The Rock did pretty well hosting *SNL* would be like saying he's a somewhat

electrifying sports-entertainer. His castmates, behind-the-scenes personnel at *SNL*, the all-important Nielsen families and even those annoying critics agreed: The Rock delivered a stellar, often hilarious performance, as did fellow Superstars Triple H, Big Show, Mick Foley and Federation Chairman Vince McMahon in cameo roles.

"He did really well. Awesome," says Federation writer Tommy Blacha, a former





NBC writer who also took part in writing *SNL* that week. "Especially considering the fact that a lot of people don't understand how hard that is. Rolling in there, meeting people, picking scripts. Things are changed on the fly so much. Things are cut out and changed at the last minute.

"I was definitely impressed with how these guys were easily accustomed to things like that," continues Blacha. "You'll see accomplished actors go on that show and bite it, because it's really difficult."

What made The Rock's accomplishment all the more impressive is that he piled the grueling *SNL* schedule on top of his normal Federation routine. After a Sunday evening house show in Albany, New York, The Rock did the live *Raw Is War* on Monday in East Rutherford, New Jersey, then taped *SmackDown!* on Tuesday night in Long Island, New York.

From there it was onto *SNL*. He put in an evening of "table reads" on Wednesday, going through upward of 40 sketches. That list was pared down to about a dozen for Thursday and Friday rehearsals. Then on Saturday, The Rock and the *SNL* cast did an early afternoon walk-through of the show, followed by a dress rehearsal in front of a live audience, and the show itself later that evening. When it was all said and done, The Rock had put in over 30 hours of work on top of his Federation schedule.

The behind-the-scenes blending of comedians and sports-entertainers went as smoothly as the live show. Rehearsals for *SNL* are a long and tiring process of stops and starts—changing dialogue, reframing scenes and endlessly running through the same scenes and lines over and over again.

Yet The Rock, someone accustomed to freer and more spontaneous one-take-only live shows, took it all in stride. All of the Federation's participants, in fact, made an impression on the *SNL* crew.

"You expect that you meet big guys and they're going to have a chip on their shoulders," says *SNL* cast member

Horatio Sanz. "I guess you start believing what you see [on TV] and [you think] that's how the person's going to be. You think, 'This guy is going to be a little arrogant.' That's the biggest surprise—that these guys are really, really nice people and they're very friendly."

For a man who spends all his on-camera time immersed in one persona, the variety of roles thrown The Rock's way presented a real challenge. From Clark Kent to the half-man/half-simian "Papa Peepers," from a drag-wearing vice cop to the human smoking-addiction cure "Nick Cotrel," The Rock had plenty of avenues to show his range as a performer. And his efforts did not go unnoticed.

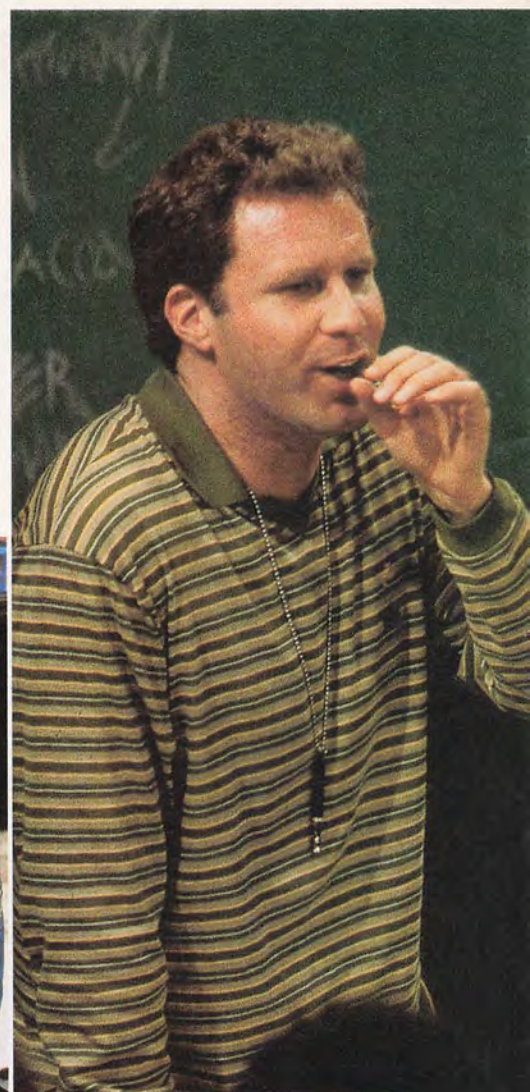
"You could tell the guy has a presence, and he knows how to work an audience," says longtime *SNL* cast member Will Ferrell. "You could tell there is a charisma about him. He seemed to pick it up pretty easily."

"I think the show, in a weird way, is at its best when you take someone who is a non-actor or a non-comedian. They always turn out to be surprising shows, because the audience probably has

low expectations for them. It's fun to put them in positions against type—it gives us a wider range to write an interesting show."

Blacha, who wrote for NBC's *Late Night with Conan O'Brien* before joining the Federation, played a major part in protecting The Rock and the other Superstars from typecasting. The *SNL* gig was an opportunity to show another side of the Federation personnel, away from the in-ring action that has made them so popular.

"[The *SNL* writers] wanted to do some chairshots, and I had to tell them,





'That stuff's not really funny. It's exciting. It's physical,'" Blacha said. "They ended up not messing with that at all. Basically, I wanted to steer them off the old-school mentality about wrestlers, and not put them in a straight-man role. I said, 'Hey, he's very capable.'

"Once they saw him at the table reads, they were like, 'Oh, he's sharp, he gets it.' It was more like steering them away from wrestling stuff when the other [Federation] guys were involved. It worked out really great, I thought."

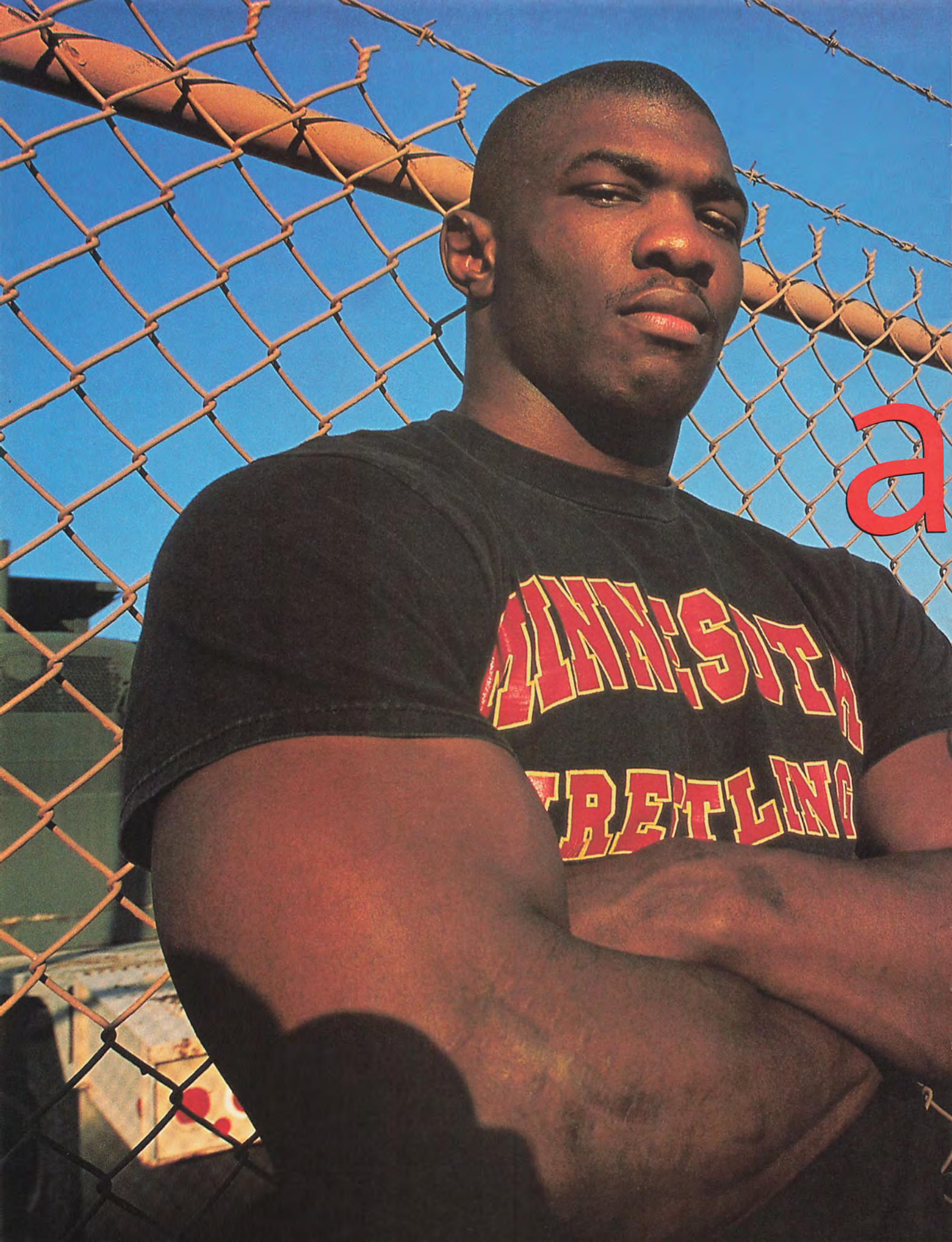
The kudos earned by The Rock and the other Superstars—particularly Paul

"Big Show" Wight, who displayed a deft comic touch—clearly work in the Federation's favor. Aside from popping the four participants in the main event at *WrestleMania* on national television only two weeks before the big match, it also showcased the versatility of the Federation's top stars.

The benefits of the Federation-SNL partnership worked both ways, though. The March 18 show averaged an 8.2 rating and a whopping 21 share in Nielsen Media Research's 47 metered markets. In layman's terms, an estimated 20 million viewers tuned in to

smell what The Rock was cookin'. It was SNL's biggest rating for this season, and its highest since February 1998. The show scored SNL's largest rating in key male demographics in six years.

"Everything you do, any exposure you get outside of our show is a plus," says Foley, who joined The Rock and Big Show in a rendition of the old Elvis Presley hit "Are You Lonesome Tonight?" "When you take into account that *Saturday Night Live* has been a mainstay in American entertainment for the last 25 seasons, it's a pretty big deal." ■



a



By Robert J. Bledsoe

# matateur invasion

It's a scene repeated across America, wherever a child is to be found. In front lawns, backyards and on city streets, boys and girls play **make-believe**, pretending to be what they want to be when they grow up.

Shelton Benjamin was no exception. But unlike youngsters who wanted to become doctors, teachers or firefighters, Benjamin wanted to be the next Nikolai Volkoff or Koko B. Ware. "Maybe around seven or eight is when I started watching professional wrestling and became a fan of it," says Benjamin.

"Like most guys, I always did the backyard wrestling. The older I got, the more I got into it, and the more I wanted to learn about it."

When, during his first year at Orangeburg-Wilkinson High School, the head wrestling coach approached him about joining the

Federation, amateur wrestling provided an outlet for grappling and became an enjoyable pastime.

While the 6'2" Benjamin was pinning opponents' shoulders to the mat, coaches from some of the country's top wrestling programs were trying to pin him down to

and desire.

"I think he's a pretty focused young man who's got some great talent and has made some good decisions about putting himself in different situations that can help him throughout life," says Coach Robinson. "I think he's very disci-

**"The more I talked to Shelton," says Gerald Brisco, "the more he impressed me...Being a two-time All-American, with the ability that requires, he just took to it like a fish in water."**

team, Benjamin didn't think twice about it.

"In South Carolina, all [we] know is pro wrestling," he says. "That's kind of what I was thinking."

The wrestling his coach had in mind, as Benjamin would soon learn, was far from his starry-eyed ideas of Double-Arm DDTs and Tombstone Piledrivers. Still, for a kid who dreamed of some day working for the World Wrestling

their schools. In the end, Benjamin chose the University of Minnesota and coach J Robinson to begin the next phase of his career.

Benjamin's amateur wrestling success in South Carolina carried over to the Land of 10,000 Lakes, where he became a two-time All-America standout competing for the Golden Gophers. But more than winning matches, Benjamin was winning over his coaches and teammates with his attitude

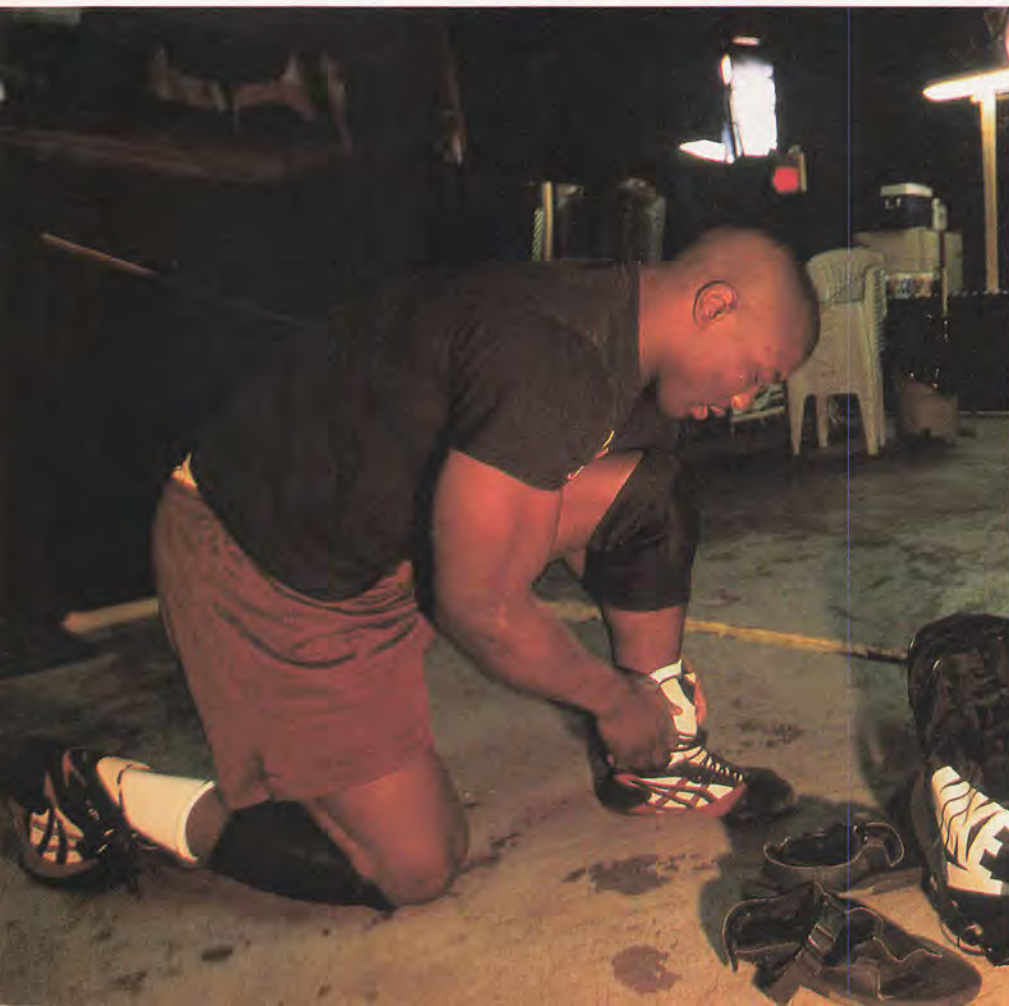
plined and that has helped him in his amateur career."

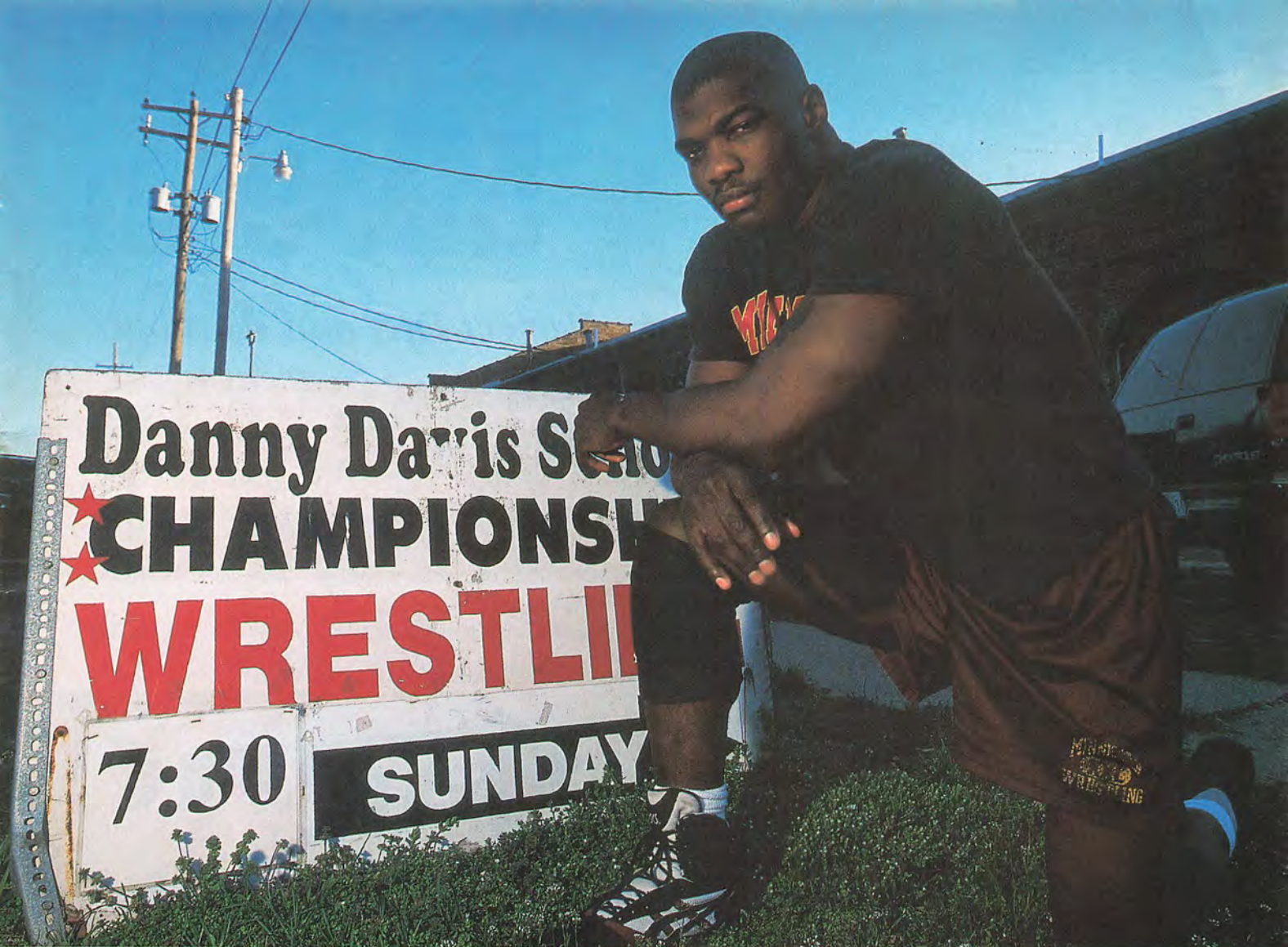
It would come as no surprise, then, that when the World Wrestling Federation's Gerald Brisco, Coach Robinson's old roommate and teammate at Oklahoma State University in the 1960s, came to him scouting talent that Benjamin's name would surface.

The two met for the first time at *SummerSlam* in Minneapolis last year, and the first impression Benjamin made on Brisco was a good one. It was so good, in fact, that Brisco knew right away that Benjamin would be a great fit in the World Wrestling Federation. Months later, Benjamin would be taking bumps and lumps of a different sort while making the grade with the Federation.

"The more I talked to Shelton," says Brisco, "the more he impressed me. So, I set up a tryout and he came up to Connecticut and went through a three-day workout. He was everything J said he was. He was a natural in the ring. Being a two-time All-American, with the ability that requires, he just took to it like a fish in water."

For Benjamin, the experience was equally rewarding and worthwhile. He packed his clothes and dreams, loaded them into his car, and headed south on the Interstate to the Federation's





developmental breeding grounds in Louisville, Kentucky—leaving behind both Robinson and his job as an assistant wrestling coach at the University of Minnesota. But he does have his coach's blessings and support.

"I think Shelton likes it," says Robinson. "It's kind of like a soap opera. He likes that part of it, and he's a great kid."

Now a year and a half removed from Minnesota, Benjamin continues to prepare for his debut in the World Wrestling Federation, whenever that may come. He's in no rush and happily heeds the advice of Brisco and other Federation officials to take things one step at a time.

"I have high expectations for myself as far as becoming good

at [sports-entertainment]," says Benjamin. "I expect the better I get, the more successful I can become in the business. Right now, my expectation is just to take in everything that I can and learn as much as possible, so that I can use it later and hopefully entertain some people."

As has been the case before, it's Benjamin's attitude that's impressing his observers, including Senior Vice President of Talent Relations and Wrestling Administration, and the voice of the Federation, Jim Ross. Benjamin, along with Federation Superstar Kurt Angle, is part of the Federation's renewed interest in recruiting and retaining amateur wrestlers. According to Ross, amateurs bring a little something extra to the table.

"We find that the [amateur wrestlers] are great goal-setters. They're very structured," says Ross. "They realize that they're going to have to make sacrifices, that this is just another level in their journey. The amateur wrestlers more often than not are as hungry as a lion and ready to go. I can't tell you exactly why that is."

At only 24 years of age, and hundreds of miles away from his alma mater, Shelton Benjamin is at Step One in realizing his dream of entering the world of sports-entertainment. He knows that his success is not guaranteed, but he's determined to stay the course and enjoy the ride.

"I'm very happy," he says. "I love my job. There's nothing else I'd rather be doing right now." ■

# Body by Mideon

*If You're Searching for the Perfect Diet and Workout to Attain that Chiseled Look...Keep Searching*

by Aaron Williams

The last couple of issues we've heard from Superstars who swear by going to the gym and eating a carefully selected diet. This issue, Dennis "Mideon" Knight gives us an entirely different perspective on the importance of working out and watching what you eat. Take what you will from his comments, but remember this: In 11 years in the business, Knight has never missed a show because of injury.

**RAW Magazine:** Do you go to the gym?

**Dennis Knight:** I've been. There's one down the street. I've been there once or twice.

**RAW:** Do you have any routines for those rare visits?

**Knight:** Well, I used to be a trainer for one of the gym chains, so I know what to do. I just don't do it.

**RAW:** Is there anyone you like going to the gym with?

**Knight:** Probably the person I've been to the gym with most is Undertaker...and maybe Chyna.

**RAW:** Do you pattern your workouts after them or anyone else?

**Knight:** You mean like following a gym rat's routine? Not really, you see, the more muscular and the firmer your body is, the more apt you are to get hurt. That's why all those big, tight muscular guys are always breaking stuff, and I'm the only one in the Federation who's been wrestling for 11 years and never had an injury.

**RAW:** Are you attributing that to your workout program?

**Knight:** Yeah, my anti-workout.

**RAW:** Are there any foods you try and stay away from?

**Knight:** Yeah, chicken breasts, egg whites—anything healthy, pretty much.

**RAW:** Any foods you particularly like or feel are important to maintaining your condition?

**Knight:** Pork rinds, at least half a bag a day.

**RAW:** If by chance you eat some healthy foods, do you feel differently?

**Knight:** I start getting extra energy, and I don't really like that too much.



**RAW:** Are you afraid the extra energy may lead to injuries?

**Knight:** Yeah. One chicken breast could put me out of the business.

**RAW:** Are there any differences in your eating habits when you are on the road as opposed to when you are at home?

**Knight:** On the road I try and hit as many Burger Kings as possible. At home there's a McDonald's close by. That's the major difference.

**RAW:** Do you ever eat low-cal foods?

**Knight:** No, I don't believe in that.

**RAW:** How many meals a day do you eat?

**Knight:** I actually only eat one—at night.

**RAW:** Do you have any trouble keeping your weight up?

**Knight:** Well, I've lost 30 pounds in the last few months. I'm basically a 300-pound anorexic.

**RAW:** Has this weight loss affected your strength?

**Knight:** No. I've pretty much had the same routine since I started wrestling. When you're out there in front of 20,000 people it doesn't matter what you eat or how you train. If you've got a 300-pound guy to pick up, you rely on what you know. It's not how you train or crap like that. I use my smarts and, for lack of a better term, lack of hardness. The guys who are all stiff and tight, they get dropped and injured.

**RAW:** How do you go about ensuring that you're mentally fit?

**Knight:** Meditation. I actually do a lot of that.

**RAW:** Do you do any cardiovascular work?

**Knight:** I really do some of that. When you're in the ring you do have to have your wind. So I do work on the Stairmaster.

**RAW:** Do you participate in any outdoor activities like swimming or running?

**Knight:** No, I don't run unless someone is chasing me.

**RAW:** Do you recommend spending a lot of time watching television?

**Knight:** Movies, actually. By the way, in my opinion movies kind of started with *Jaws* and *Smokey and the Bandit*. My all-time favorite is *The Exorcist*. For a big match, I'd rather spend two hours watching *The Exorcist* than one hour in the gym.

**RAW:** Is there anybody on the roster with a similar workout philosophy?



**Knight:** Road Dogg and I have the exact same philosophy. We travel together and we're pretty much both big, fat rednecks. We just don't put as much importance in the physical fitness, as say, Test or Jericho do.

**RAW:** Do you play or watch other sports?

**Knight:** The only sports team that I really follow is the Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

**RAW:** Is [Buccaneers defensive tackle] Warren Sapp proof of your fitness philosophy?

**Knight:** Exactly. Warren Sapp is my hero. He just shows that you don't have to be the best-looking, most-built guy to get the job done, and that goes for this business, too. You don't have to be Arnold Schwarzenegger to be a wrestler. Look at Terry Funk or Mick Foley.

**RAW:** Is your workout philosophy similar to Foley's?

**Knight:** Yeah.

**RAW:** Do you guys ever talk about your philosophy versus the gym rats' philosophy?

**Knight:** Yeah, we make fun of them.

**RAW:** Anyone in particular you like going after?

**Knight:** Brian Christopher. I'm on him all the time. He's a fantastic wrestler, but he gets hurt. He's just too tight and too stiff, and he ends up hurting himself.

**RAW:** Does he listen to you?

**Knight:** No.

**RAW:** Do you do any flexibility training?

**Knight:** I have the unique ability to transfer my whole body into rubber at any point. I'm extremely flexible, which goes back to the point of not being a statue. I've come back through the curtain so many times and everyone thought I'd really been injured, and I was fine.

**RAW:** Do you have any advice for all the readers out there?

**Knight:** Yeah, don't take anything too seriously. ■

By Mike Fazioli

# The Long Road Back

**R**eturning to work from a serious spinal injury is a daunting task for anyone, but none more so than for those who put their bodies on the line in the world of sports-entertainment.

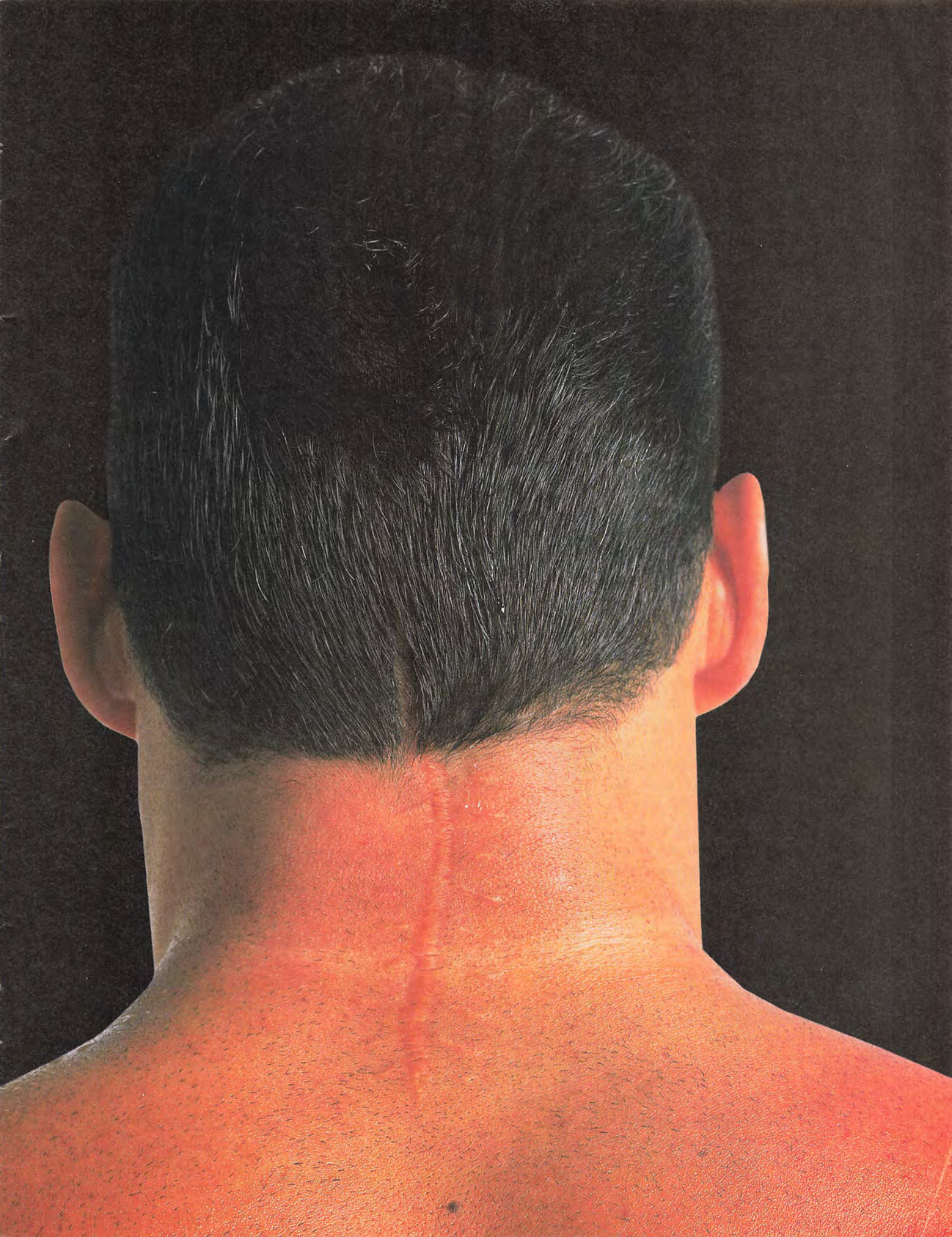
"I'd watch the Steiner Brothers in the ring against the Eliminators and they'd take these crazy bumps and I'd cringe," says Tazz as he recalls his own injuries and his first time stepping back into the ring. "I was thinking, 'How am I going to do this again?' I didn't tell anyone I was thinking that, but I was terrified to take a bump."

In addition to fracturing two vertebrae, Tazz tore several muscles in his neck during his accident. In the six years since the incident, he has yet to have a day completely free of pain. "As I'm talking to you right

now, sitting on the floor playing with my son, looking down...I can only look down for a few seconds before I have to pick my head up and look down again, because my neck and shoulders spasm so quickly," says Tazz.

Tazz got the bad news from doctors at the worst possible time, making it easy for him to decline their advice and get about the business of climbing back into the ring. "I said back to them, 'Well, who's going to pay my mortgage?'" he says. "I just got back from my honeymoon that week and it happened to me. My wife and I had just had a house built on Long Island [New York], and we had a heavy mortgage. ECW and [owner] Paul Heyman were nice enough to pay me for the nine months I was out, and paid for my rehab. I just busted my ass to get back in the ring."

"It was one of those things," says Dean Malenko, "where the doctors said, 'You can probably go through the rest of your life and nothing will happen, or you could get whacked on the back of the head and end up a vegetable...I opted for the surgery...but didn't know if I would ever wrestle again.'"



But Tazz was fortunate enough not to have to go under the knife. Others, like Sean (X-Pac) Waltman, Stevie Richards and Dean Malenko, weren't so lucky. All three endured career-threatening neck and spinal surgeries, and have made successful comebacks.

Malenko's surgery stemmed from a 1977 car accident while he was still in high school. A post-accident exam revealed that Malenko was born with six cervical vertebrae instead of the normal seven. This left the already accomplished amateur wrestler highly susceptible to serious spinal injury. He opted for fusion surgery, in which two of the vertebrae were joined together.

"It was one of those things where the doctors said, 'You can probably go through the rest of your life and nothing will happen, or you could get whacked on the back of the head and end up a vegetable,'" Malenko said. "So, at 16 years old, I opted for the surgery. But with that in mind, I didn't know if I would ever wrestle again."

While Malenko, Richards and Tazz were told straight-out by doctors to abandon their mat careers, Waltman, who fractured his neck in a match during his first tenure in the World Wrestling Federation as the 1-2-3 Kid, suffered a more serious spinal injury in October 1997, while working for World Championship Wrestling (WCW). Waltman underwent fusion surgery and missed 10 months of action, yet his doctor was optimistic from the beginning.

"He was positive from the time I walked in there," Waltman says. "He was great. If you look at my neck, you can barely see the scar. He told me he could fix [my neck]. He did, too. I've hurt my neck since, but I've always recovered from it."

The Superstars who spoke to *RAW Magazine* said they were all told by doctors that their physical size and strength were major factors in protecting them from more catastrophic injury and in allowing them to rehab and



return to work. They did return to the squared circle, but not without some setbacks.

"I was stupid," says Richards, who was first injured when Terry Funk dropped a metal guardrail on the back of his neck during an ECW card in Buffalo. "I had paralysis in the ring in May, and [then I] wrestled two weeks later." This time, Richards' injuries were more severe. He suffered a cracked vertebra, herniated disc and various other damage to the C-5, C-6 and C-7 area of his spinal column. "In December of '97 I felt numbness again in my second match back with ECW [after leaving WCW]. That's when I said, 'That's it, I can't go on without getting the surgery,'" he remembers. "If I had gotten it any later than I did, I might not be able to wrestle. I waited probably as long as you can."

To make matters worse, when Richards finally had the surgery he needed, his vocal chords were damaged during the procedure. He underwent a second operation three months later to receive an implant for his vocal chords, and his voice remains raspy to this day.

The scratchy voice is not Richards' only reminder of his injuries and long road back to the ring. His experiences go way beyond the physical pain and

trauma. "Mentally it's tougher, because it's always in the back of your mind," he says. "You can build your muscles up and know your muscles are strong; you know the bone is fused. But you also remember the feeling of laying in the ring paralyzed, and not knowing not only if you're ever going to wrestle again, but if you're going to walk again and live a normal life. That's a mental scar I don't think will ever heal."

Richards isn't alone in that respect. In one form or another, the painful past remains with the Superstars always.

"I don't take as many risks," Waltman says. "Every time I get hurt I modify my style. I mean, it's a business, too. If you mess up your equipment, you can't do business."

In a close-knit working environment like the one the Superstars enjoy while on the road, knowledge of each other's weaknesses and injuries is readily shared. Wrestlers who have been previously injured often have specific bumps that they are reluctant to take, and far more often than not their fellow Superstars accommodate them.

Waltman admits he is very reluctant to take bumps in which he is driven straight down into the mat, like the Tombstone piledriver. Yet he has worked numerous matches with Kane



and taken more than his share of Tombstones.

"I take them because I have a lot of trust in [Kane] and in the Undertaker; I've taken them from him, too," Waltman says. "Those two guys are very powerful, but they know my situation. The last thing they want to do is hurt me."

"You want to be professional and pay your dues and prove yourself," says Federation newcomer Tazz. "Most of the boys in the locker room know who's been hurt and most of them know I had a neck injury. They're really cool when you talk with them about adapting a move."

It was with a certain amount of trepidation that the Superstars returned to the ring. Despite having the will to endure grueling and painful rehab, stepping between the ropes and bracing for that first bump may have been the toughest test of all.

"I'd say maybe half a dozen times in my career I've been dinged and had to step back and say, 'Hold on, am I doing the right thing here?'" Malenko says. "But I still live under the theory that I could walk across the street tomorrow and get hit by a car." ■





# The Hard Sell

Keeping Federation merchandise on the shelves is almost as hard as living life on the road. Jimmy Miranda does both.

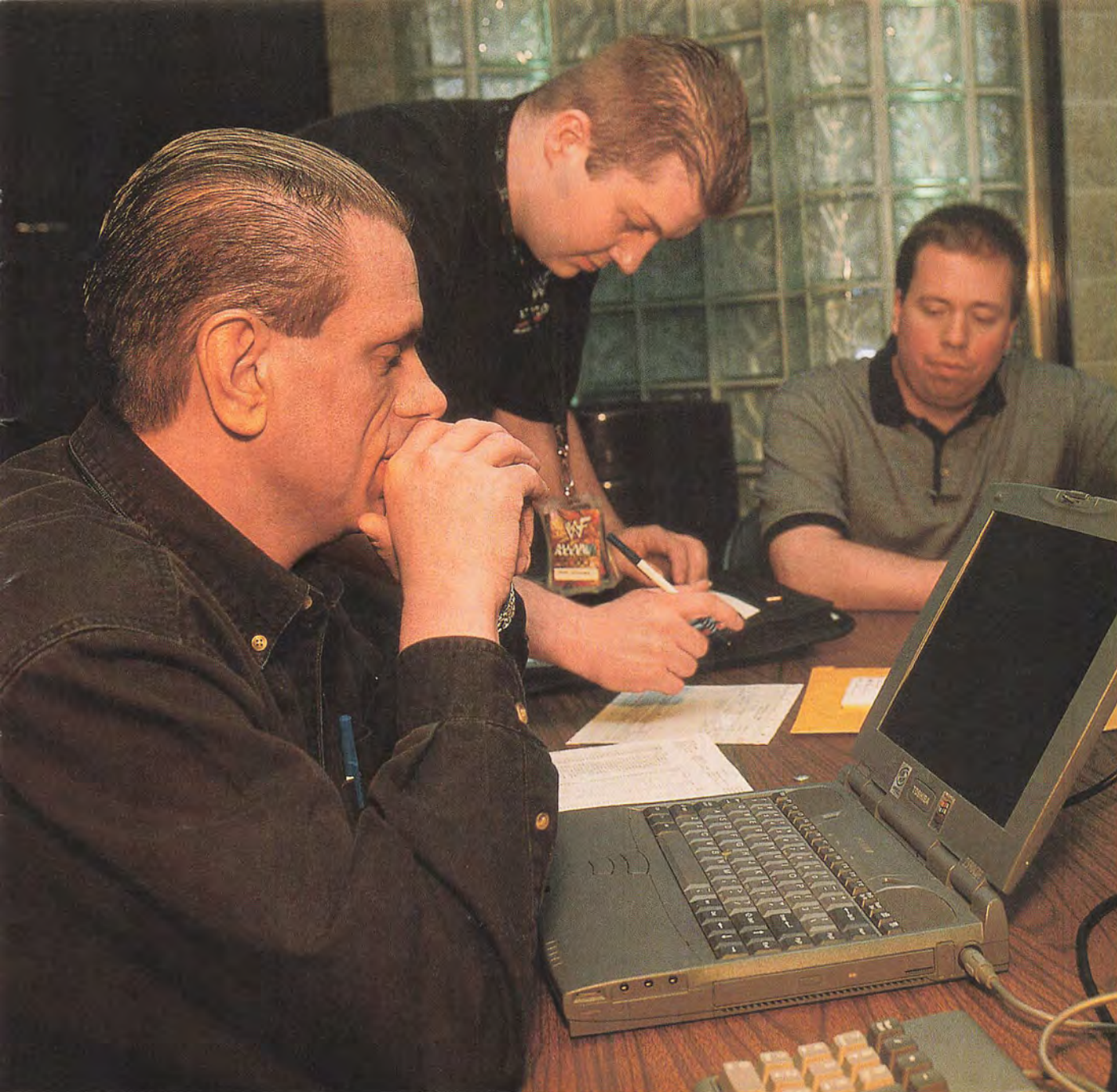
## If you've ever been to a Federation event

and found that perfect T-shirt, poster or other souvenir to remember your experience, you might want to thank World Wrestling Federation Venue Merchandising Coordinator Jimmy Miranda. Organizing merchandise sales for 200 shows a year takes a great deal of time and effort, and for the past 13 years, Miranda's been working hard to make sure that the Federation's best merchandise makes its way to arenas and is available for purchase.

Miranda began working for the Federation in 1986 as a member of the ring crew. After working on the crew for a little over a year, he moved into the Merchandising Department and embarked upon a sports-entertainment odyssey that has taken him to 47 of the 50 states and scores of arenas in hundreds of cities. In the 14 years he's been with the company, Miranda has played an important role in helping transform the World Wrestling Federation from a regional wrestling promotion into one of the most recognizable brand names in the world.

"When we first started in this [venue merchandising], we really didn't have a firm grasp of things," Miranda remembers. "We basically taught ourselves. But now, we're very well-respected in the business. We have good relationships with the arenas, and they look forward to having us."

A typical day for Miranda begins several hours before the show begins. It's his responsibility to make sure that all the merchandise shipped to the arena is present and accounted for. Once the merchandise has been counted in, Miranda, his assistant Derek Casselman, and the arena staff will make sure that merchandise and program booths are set up properly. During the shows, Miranda can usually be found patrolling the concourse, monitoring sales and doing whatever is necessary to ensure that fans get the merchandise they want. After the show has ended and the fans have left, Miranda reconciles the receipts and packs the unsold merchandise so that it can be shipped back to the warehouse. Once his work at the arena is done, Miranda goes back to the



hotel for a few hours sleep before heading to the next venue.

Last October, after having spent over 13 years on the road, Miranda contracted a mysterious viral infection that put him on the sidelines for five months. For the first time in his career, he was unable to travel with the rest of the World Wrestling Federation crew, and he missed it terribly. With the aid of family, friends and co-workers, however, Miranda fought off the infection and made a triumphant return to the road in March.

"Everybody was so great to me while I was out, but it was really great to be back with that part of the family that we have [on the road]. I've worked with a lot of them [Federation Superstars and crew] for a very long time, and it was just really nice to be back."

And for the Federation family, the feeling was mutual. "Jimmy is a valuable member of our team," states Cynthia J.

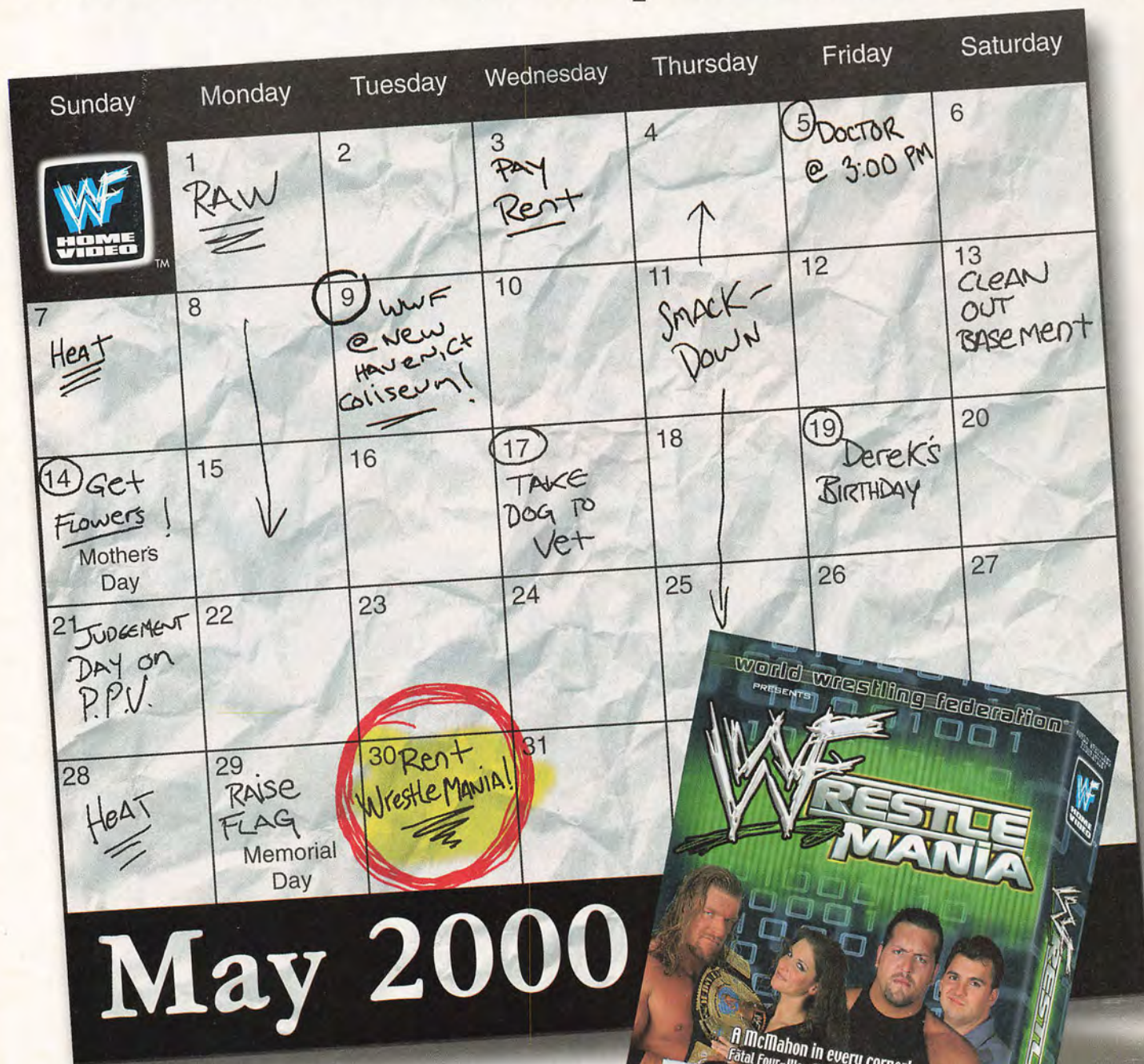
Money, Senior Vice President Merchandise. "We're glad he's better, and from both a personal and professional standpoint, it's great to have him back."

For Miranda, working for the World Wrestling Federation has been a dream come true. He enjoyed watching the World Wide Wrestling Federation (WWWF) as a child, and feels fortunate that he has been able to work in a field and with a company that has become so much a part of his life. Over the years, he has made many friends and seen just about everything one could imagine. But even with all the great memories, he still feels that the Federation's best days are yet to come.

"We've got the best group of people that we've ever had here. Everybody wants to work hard and make the World Wrestling Federation an even more successful company. I'm just thankful that I can be a part of it." ■

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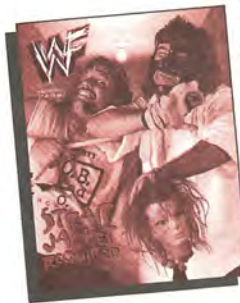
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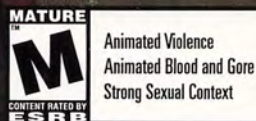


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❖ NEW DUKE NUKEM™ GAME ONLY FOR THE PLAYSTATION™ GAME CONSOLE! ❖ IMMERSIVE 3RD-PERSON SHOOT'EM-UP ACTION! ❖ 14 UNIQUE MISSIONS! ❖ 2-PLAYER MULTIPLAY!  
❖ 18 KICK-ASS WEAPONS, PLUS LOADS OF HIGH-TECH GADGETS! ❖ FEATURES IN-GAME MUSIC BY STATIC X, COURTESY OF WARNER BROS. RECORDS®! ❖ ONE MILLION BABES. ONE DUKE. ANY QUESTIONS?



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